CAPTAIN PLUCK

ISLA MAY MULLINS

Class PZ7

Book .M92

Ca

Copy 2

CAPTAIN PLUCK

ISLA MAY MULLINS

CAPTAIN PLUCK

BY

ISLA MAY MULLINS

Author of "The Blossom Shop," "Uncle Mary," "Anne's Wedding," "Timothy's Second Wife," etc.

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

copy 2

PZ7
.M92
Ca
Copy 2

COPYRIGHT, 1923,
BY THE SUNDAY SCHOOL BOARD
OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

TRANSFERRED FROM
COPYRIGHT OFFICE
SEP 2 1923

CAPTAIN PLUCK. I

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

MAY -3 1923

FOREWORD

The author of this book hereby publicly acknowledges that she surreptitiously gathered the material for the story, gave facts her own interpretation and now offers them to her readers without consent of the leading character herein portrayed.

I. M. M.

Louisville, Ky.

CONTENTS

		PAGE
PROLOGUE		11
I	A FRIGHT	13
II	A TRIP WITH FATHER	16
III	VARIED EXPERIENCES	26
IV	A PUBLIC MAN IN EMBRYO	37
V	GHOSTS	42
VI	GETTING DROWNED	50
VII	A MOVE	57
VIII	IN TEXAS	64
IX	HUNTING PRAIRIE CHICKENS	69
X	BEN	80
XI	WILD GOOSE HUNTING	95
XII	A PRINTER'S DEVIL	103
XIII	A NORTHER AND A PRAIRIE FIRE	123
XIV	A TELEGRAPH OPERATOR	132
XV	A YOUTHFUL DEBATER IS DEVELOPED	164
XVI	A COLLEGE BOY	176
XVII	A TELEGRAPH OPERATOR AGAIN	199
XVIII	A STUDENT OF LAW	221
XIX	ANCHORED	228

CAPTAIN PLUCK

CAPTAIN PLUCK

PROLOGUE

THE New Year had just opened with its fresh promise of life and eager beginnings, when an unusual stir came upon a country household in the stillness of a southern winter night, and after it had died away somewhat the man stepped into his wife's room and beheld a bundle of muslin and lace folded close within her arms.

"A boy," she said, her eyes like stars.

"A boy!" he repeated joyfully. The little son for whom he had longed. There had been three sturdy small girls, but he wanted the son,—and the son had been given him.

The man dropped upon his knees by his wife's bed, tears of joy flooding his cheeks. Her eyes o'erflowed in response, but only to heighten the ecstasy which stirred in their depths.

A prayer came involuntarily to the man's lips:

"O, Lord may this our son preach thy word to needy men."

I

A FRIGHT

IT was Sunday morning and Paul Shelton, the preacher's little boy, was at church for the first time. He sat very still beside his three older sisters for awhile listening to the singing, the prayers, and looking at the people, but when Father began to talk straight along about things he didn't understand, while everybody sat motionless, and even the little sisters seemed almost inanimate to him, he grew restless. He was an out-door boy anyway, and when Mother was not noticing, he slipped from his seat down the aisle and out into the churchyard. There the birds kept him company, and the fallen

leaves rustled gaily as he trudged through them, just as they did at home. He had been very anxious to come to the mysterious thing which the older folk called church,—and it was nice, but in spite of his preacher ancestry he decided the outside was more to his liking than the inside. He was soon on a tour of investigation and made his way down a slope to the back of the church building, where he discovered a narrow trench cut in a sweeping curve something like a road, but with big pieces of wood lying cross-wise all along it and two shining strips of steel laid upon them. He had hardly time to wonder what it was for, when there came a loud rumble from around the curve and the next instant a great puffing, hissing, smoking, terrible thing rushed by like something wild. O, the terror of that

moment, and how he fled for the church! "Father, Father!" The little feet flew up the aisle while the breast heaved with swelling sobs. But a friendly, inviting smile, and beckoning hand held out from one of the pews stopped him and soon a big, red apple helped to choke down the sobs. Inside the fold proved best after all was his sage conclusion.

II

A TRIP WITH FATHER

PAUL, a small boy of six years with short, brown curls pushing out from the brim of his cap, sat on a big bay horse at the doorstep, his legs kicking the bay's sides energetically, a signal which the bridle did not need to countermand, for Prince well knew his little rider only meant play.

Mr. Shelton, a tall, dark-haired man with brown eyes which were the counterpart of the boy's, soon came out, and vaulting easily into the saddle upon the big bay's mate, gave a touch from his booted heel and started both horses briskly down the road.

Mrs. Shelton, tall and willowy, stood

in the doorway and smiled as long as a little brown hand could be seen waving gleefully back, and occasionally waved in response.

The two were going some fifteen miles away to drive home a new milch cow and her calf which Mr. Shelton had bought, and Paul was so proud to be riding off horseback with Father. The horses were his intimate friends, he had been upon their backs at will ever since he could remember, but this was his first long ride away from home. They cantered down the road in the sweet spring time, the boy talking about everything along the way and Mr. Shelton responding absently, or more frequently not at all, for he was a preacher and thinker, and being a planter as well, sermons were not often made under a

roof, but texts were chosen and arguments unfolded in the open.

As the day went on the boy's chatter lessened, till the last three or four miles were passed in silence, and had the father noticed he would have seen the little fellow straighten up manfully over and over to keep from falling asleep, but he was too proud to complain. At last they drew rein before a substantial farmhouse, and were greeted cordially by a genial, rotund gentleman.

Mr. Coleman at once stepped up to the little fellow and taking him in his capacious arms said, "Well, little chap, I came mighty near thinking you were a squirrel perched upon this big mare and just shooing you off to the woods, but I believe you are a sure enough boy, and you can come right in to the fire." It had grown chilly as night came on.

They went in and had a good supper of broiled ham, hot biscuits and syrup, then gathered around the fire again. This time Father did the talking, the host and his wife proving good listeners, and the talk went on and on unceasingly the boy thought. He pulled himself together over and over, trying manfully to keep awake and erect, but O he was so tired! The long, long ride in the air, the open fire, the full little stomach with the flow of talk which he could not understand, were all too much for him. Never through a long life would he forget that evening. "O would they never, never ask him to go to bed? O, oh, he could not stand it another minute!" But nobody noticed, and he was visiting, and Mother had said he must behave very, very nice, oh, oh, oh!

But all things do end at last, and he was finally in bed fast asleep beside his father, miles and miles away from home and Mother.

Next morning when Paul opened his eyes Father was almost dressed, and he couldn't think where he was. He looked about for awhile for Flora, Blanche and Sallie. Not one was in sight, or what was more remarkable, within hearing, and even their bed was gone! Then the strange room pressed in upon his consciousness and memory of the great journey he had made came thrillingly back. He bounded up, a new boy after the night's rest, and was soon dressed.

Mr. and Mrs. Coleman had no children, and both gave him warm greeting when he went in to breakfast.

"Well, brer Squirrel," said Mr. Coleman, "did you sleep any last night?"

Paul's eyes twinkled at the gay question while he timidly said, "Yes, Sir."

"And are you going to drive off my muley cow and her baby this morning?"

There was another pleased, timid, "Yes, sir," and the elders took up the talk after the old fashioned way of elders who expected children to be seen and not heard.

After breakfast the cow and calf were brought out, Mr. Coleman tenderly patting the gentle animal in good-bye after the manner of one who loves his brutes, while Paul and his father mounted the bays once more and the little procession soon started off. Both carried whips, the father a big, long one, while Paul's was slim and smaller.

Mr. Coleman laughed as he saw the little erect figure on the big bay, and the

business-like swing of his whip as they started off, and he called out:

"See here, brer Squirrel, I'm going to have a ranch out West some day, and I want you for head cow-boy."

"All right," called back the high treble voice, as he followed after the nervous cow and bleating calf.

Poor, helpless dumb brutes, we will that they shall leave a home where all life has been spent, we take them from the meadows where they have grazed and slept, from the mates that have given them companionship, and drive them over strange, rough roads whither they know not. Paul's tender heart was touched a moment later when, to his astonishment, as they passed the familiar bounds of the muley's home, she ran hither and thither and mooed pathetically.

"Why, she don't want to go with us, Father," he said in surprise and dismay.

Mr. Shelton laughed and replied, "Of course she doesn't, but we must take her anyway."

"But, Father, she may not like to stay when we get her home," persisted the little boy.

His father laughed again and said, emphatically, "Well, what of that?" and was too busy heading the cow here and there to think of sentiment.

But a damper had fallen on the little boy's spirit and he did his part only in a half-hearted way, till his father said sharply: "Look here, are you the boy that was going to help me drive this cow and calf home? I'll have to bring Blanche next time."

This was enough: ignoring the tender appeal of his heart with true soldier

courage and spirit, he threw himself into the task and proved a good herdsman. There was a most exciting time when they came to a deep railroad cut over which a bridge had been thrown and the poor, bewildered cow seemed determined not to cross it. In her fright she ran straight to the edge of the embankment and seemed about to plunge over when a wild bleat from the calf helped Mr. Shelton to turn her course.

It was altogether a stirring experience and Paul's cheeks glowed and his eyes were full of the fire of victory when they finally drove the muley and her calf into the stable yard at home. But when the thrill of battle was over, and he stood that evening by the tired cow as she lay with the nestling calf, he thought she seemed to look at him reproachfully with her big, brown eyes

and he laid his head against her and sobbed. It proved a sympathetic compact between him and the cow which neither forgot. Perhaps he was a link for her between the old home and the new, she had seen him there, she saw him here,—and brute-like she forgave him.

III

VARIED EXPERIENCES

TALL for his years and rather slender, Paul always went swinging along with a little spring in his step which betokened perennial exhilaration. He was ever on a tour of investigation that held most interesting possibilities, and often dangers as well.

One morning he might have been seen in this characteristic gait going along a new locality looking for developments of interest on the right hand and on the left. He came to a large yard with a high, close board fence and the big gate thereto standing a bit open. Of course he stepped in, took a look about and while he was wonderingly

observing the make-up of a butcher's pen, a pack of dogs suddenly rushed into view, and with terrific growls and snapping came upon him. The first impulse was flight and run he did with all his might, but in an instant the ferocious beasts had thrown him to the ground, and only the fact that there were so many of them that they were in one another's way, prevented his being instantly torn to pieces. Their very frenzy kept any one of them from being allowed to reach him with their gaping jaws, and the butcher's force of men were at last upon them beating them right and left.

When they stood the little fellow upon his feet at last, he cried, "They didn't get me! I'm not hurt!"

Investigation proved that there were many scratches but only one bite of

much consequence. This was on the arm. One of the men insisted on taking him home and explaining the accident. When they reached the house Mr. Shelton and Uncle Ed were arguing some theological points on the front porch, a favorite occupation for them. After they had heard the story and the arm had been properly dressed, Mr. Shelton said:

"If that boy was not the luckiest fellow in the world he wouldn't be alive a week. He is always getting into some danger."

"I would choose the term 'plucky' instead," said Uncle Ed, still argumentative, but also observant, as the little fellow walked off unconcerned as though nothing had happened, and the next time he met Paul greeted him with:

"How are you, Captain Pluck?"

With a flash of interest and inquiry in his eyes the boy looked up, but his Uncle Ed went straight on. Paul did not understand exactly how it had come about, but he proudly gathered the idea that Uncle Ed thought him plucky and determined to deserve the name. He had been told after his encounter with the dogs never to run from one but to stand his ground, and this he determined to do henceforth. His resolution was put to severe test a few years later when in passing some negro cabins a group of angry dogs came upon him. He halted at once and called to two men within hearing to come to his help, but they went their way thinking that the dogs meant no harm, and he stood firmly in their midst keeping them at bay till a colored woman ran with a

kettle of boiling water and sent them flying, while he came off with torn trousers and coat-sleeves and sundry scratches as trophies.

Captain Pluck clung to him as a name and on the whole was not inappropriate.

Paul thought if it was good policy not to run from dogs, it might be well to stand your ground in other encounters. Soon after the first experience with dogs, he came running in the house one evening about dusk, every nerve and muscle alive with interest and excitement.

"O, Mother," he cried, "I've seen a real, live bear!"

She quietly smiled her disbelief.

"O, but I did, Mother! I met him in the road and at first I was so s'prised I didn't know what to do. But then

I thought 'well, I'm not going to run, Mr. Bear,' and I stood right still. He stood still too, and we looked good at each other. Then he raised up on his hind legs and let his fore paws hang, like a dog doing tricks. At last he put them down and trotted away. Truly, Mother, it was a real bear."

"Why, child, there are no bears about here, it couldn't be," said his mother. But just then a man came in, all excitement, and told of meeting a bear down the road from which he had run with all his speed. And he declared he heard the bear coming after him for a long distance till he got away from the woods into the open. It really proved that a tame bear had escaped his keeper and the village was in a state of excitement until he was captured.

About this time, however, there came

an episode under which the little boy's flying colors faded somewhat.

He was down at the sawmill watching the hauling of huge piles of lumber that were bound together by chains and attached to oxen. As a big load started off across the field, the lumber bobbing about heavily on the uneven surface, it suddenly seemed to Paul a fine opportunity for a ride. So, bounding forward, he mounted a swaying lumber pile and for a brief space rode gaily on. Then, alas, over went the heavy timber, catching Paul's leg fast beneath it! Lustily he screamed, while the big black driver ran to his rescue, and finally carried the little boy with a badly lacerated, blood-smirched leg (but undamaged lungs) to the house. Into his mother's arms he went, while the family gathered about, and screams abated not till his father

sternly said, "Where's that Captain Pluck Uncle Ed talks about?"

Living up to high ideals, even as represented in a name, is not always easy as Paul was often to find. Life unfolds for the young in most interesting and delightful ways, but death stalks always beside Life, and children, even, cannot evade it!

For Paul Life one sunny spring morning brought a wonderful surprise. His father came in and smiling down on the boy, said, "Come with me, I have something for you."

So, together, the two made their way through the back yard and down to a large lot where the horses grazed and rested. As soon as they came in sight of the lot, Paul spied a little colt stalking beside its mother on very wobbly legs.

"O, father, there is a new little colt!"

His father smiled in return, and when they stood by the tall, wobbly young sorrel, said quietly, "It is yours, if you want it."

Want it? The boy was in ecstasy.

How he watched that colt! For days he would hardly leave the lot, and wonderful visions grew through several weeks of the time to come when he would prance about on his own pony!

But, alas, that lurking shadow of Life!

One morning Paul went down to the lot, as usual, and a negro stable boy told him at the door that his colt was dead—had been kicked in the head by a horse.

Dead! What did dead mean? Paul had heard the word, of course, many times, but it had not touched Life within his range of vision. He looked so dazed

and uncomprehending that the stable boy said brutally, "Come yere an' look."

And Paul looked for the first time on the ruthlessness of death.

His beloved little colt lay before him stiff and staring! O, it was horrible!

He turned and ran stumbling and sobbing to his mother.

"My colt is dead. Dead! I can't have my colt dead, I can't, I can't!"

And it took both father and mother to quiet, to comfort and to try to make him understand.

Of course the inevitableness of death finally settled upon the young spirit, and in turn was transmuted again through the overwhelming joy of Life, but it was a long time before Paul could talk about his colt.

While this experience was still fresh, a little negro child down at the "quar-

ters" also died, and Paul, holding fast to Aunt Sofy's hand, looked with awe at the little lifeless thing. But it helped to reconcile and adjust his rebellious spirit, for his father talked tenderly of heaven, and as the boy listened, it opened for him a dawning sense of death's necessity as an avenue to heaven—a place where everybody wanted to go, sometime!

IV

A PUBLIC MAN IN EMBRYO

PAUL started early to school and made good progress with books. He had a natural aptitude for study and it opened to him a large realm for interesting investigation. But when there was added to this the stimulus of contest, he was in his element. So the spelling class was his great delight. The pupil who was head of the class at the end of the week must go to the foot for next week, and the scholar found at the head the greatest number of Friday afternoons within three months won a prize of great worth—perhaps fifty cents in silver! With every faculty alert Paul took part in these spelling

contests when about eight years old. His eyes sparkled with victory as Friday after Friday found him at the head of his class. And when at the end of three months a mammoth fifty cent piece was laid in his hands, no winner of the Victoria cross was ever more athrill with pride and joy.

A school exhibition was at hand and Paul was given part. A little poem, beginning,

> "The lark is up to meet the sun,
> The bee is on the wing,"

was given him to recite and was speedily committed to memory. He took the affair as a matter of course, just as he did an ordinary lesson.

When the night arrived, however, he began to have a queer sensation as he looked out from the platform at the sea of faces before him, and he picked out

father, mother and the little sisters from among them with no special feeling of pleasure.

"The boy stood on the burning deck," unflinchingly, Bingen adorned the Rhine with ease if not grace, through the talent of other pupils, and then Paul was called upon to bring out his lark and bee. He stepped forward, but something certainly was the matter with his knees. Somehow he got to the front. Panic-stricken he managed to open his mouth and produce the lark; tremblingly he brought it up to meet the sun, but wavered and wavered on the bee, finally breaking down utterly, without ever getting it on the wing,—and then, his legs recovering themselves marvelously, he rushed from the platform out the back door.

He never was so astounded in his

life! What did it all mean? He hadn't the least idea, but was keenly, hopelessly conscious of mortification from some source.

When the family reached home, Paul walking dejectedly behind, alone, his father took him to task.

"See here, Paul, what did you mean by giving up? You certainly do not deserve Uncle Ed's name for you, and ought to have that fine spelling prize taken away from you if you have no more pluck than that. You ought to have stuck it out if it killed you. I can't have any boy of mine a coward—one grain of courage would have carried you through that all right. Next time you are wanted for a thing like that, take the task and don't let me be ashamed of you again."

This was heroic treatment, but it was

effectual. The next time Paul appeared in public he went through his part, something like a cyclone perhaps, but he did not falter, although he thought as he rose and faced the crowd that death would surely come. Once having won, he had no further trouble, and learned in time, even as a boy, to greatly enjoy public speech.

V

GHOSTS

FAVORITE haunts of the Shelton children, as with southern children everywhere a generation ago, were the kitchen and cabin of the family servants. The kitchen was near the house, the cabin at the rear of the big back yard. The negro "quarters," which housed those who worked on the plantation, were some distance back, and the children were not often allowed to go near them.

Aunt Sofy, the cook, was their special favorite. They loved to gather at her cabin door, or invade her kitchen.

"Now you chillun jes' keep out o' my kitchen," Aunt Sofy would exclaim,

with a most inviting face that held them right there.

"Lemme see yo' hands," she would say next. And as they were held up she would scornfully command: "Go wash 'em dis minute, don' you come here wid no dirty hands." They knew then what was coming and flew to the house to return promptly displaying clean little palms.

The soft dough was rolled out and each child allowed to lay its palm upon it, while Aunt Sofy's knife followed the line of every finger and their very own hands were there, which were simply beautiful, and made most delicious cakes when baked.

There was the long line of snowy clothes which hung out on Mondays in the back yard to dry, and the long pole with a forked end to lift the swaying

line, which was the cause of many childish troubles, for how could little feet always remember to keep far enough away, and when the pole came down and the snowy clothes swept the earth, the civil war was as nothing in comparison. Aunt Sofy was mighty in her wrath if anything happened to "dem clothes," and erring feet flew for refuge to the house.

She was a great disciplinarian and when the children gathered in her cabin, she did not neglect her opportunity.

"Yas, I makes my chillun mind! Ef dey don't I jes' hangs 'em up by de heels in de chimbly and smokes 'em wid red pepper." And visions of their own small heels stuck up in that great "chimbley," with head hanging amid fumes of red pepper—which that unsteady

clothes pole might any day bring about, kept them in reasonable subjection.

Aunt Sofy was also a great believer in ghosts.

"Ter be shore I saw 'em las' night, right out dar at de garden, a standing in de gate. One great tall one in de middle an' a small one on each side ob him, all ob 'em dressed in de whitest, coldest white dat was ever on arth. Ain't I been seein' ghostes all my life? I knows 'em."

The children listened awe-struck and flew to the house at last with throbbing hearts. But once in the warm, bright sitting room with father and mother, the ghosts vanished for the little girls. But Paul was highly imaginative and they didn't leave him so easily. When the light was out at bedtime, he could peer through the darkness and there, sure

enough, were Aunt Sofy's three ghosts in the garden gate! The big tall one, and the short ones on each side, all dressed in the whitest, coldest white, like nothing on earth! He could see them just as plainly as she did, and if he waked in the night, sometimes he found them stationed in the corners of his room!

Soon after making ghostly acquaintanceship, Paul begged late one day to go over to Uncle Ed's to spend the night.

"Why, it is too far and too late for you to go alone over there," his mother exclaimed in surprise at his wanting to go.

"O, I'm not afraid," returned Paul with real big-boy's brag.

"All right," his mother replied smilingly, "go on."

So, off the little boy started with big, long strides. It was fully two miles over there, but he had walked it before, and of course there was nothing to be afraid of!

The walk was fine against a stiff breeze, with home in sight and familiar things along the way—but dark in the south has a habit of coming down very suddenly, and with no warning. So, on that night when dark dropped its sombre curtain unheralded over everything, Paul, startled, looked quickly back toward home only to find the house lost in shadows. Then he turned as quickly again to look ahead for Uncle Ed's house—but not a far tree or lofty chimney could he make out!

But, lo! as he strained forward, his frightened eye caught sight of something just ahead—something terrible!

A great white something with gaunt waving arms!

Paul took no second look. Whirling about, his feet flew back along the road with almost incredible swiftness till home was reached. Then, he suddenly remembered his brag that he wasn't afraid to go over to Uncle Ed's so late!

He quickly decided to do his panting outside the house. When he finally went calmly in, nobody noticed him except mother, who threw him a wise smile.

Next day he determined to find out if that great white thing was still in the corner of the fence,—and under the gleam of the morning sun it proved to be a tall, broken corn-stalk which had waved long white, sun-dried foliage in the stiff breeze! He stood still in the road and laughed heartily at himself.

Then he thought scornfully of Aunt Sofy's ghosts—and this experience should have banished them forever, but it must be recorded that it did not. Night and day are two such entirely different things!

Besides those ghosts with which the old darkey peopled his childish mind were like Banquo's, hard to down. They appeared and reappeared many times in his later life before he finally won fully the battle against superstition.

VI

GETTING DROWNED

ONE late summer day father and mother Shelton took the trio of little girls, Flora in all the importance of her superior years, Blanche all gleam and glisten, with dancing blue eyes and bobbing yellow ringlets which caught every straying gleam of sun, and Sallie with the clinging brown curls and big, soft, dark eyes, also the two boys, Paul and Willie,—all were fitted into the big carriage behind the two bays, and went over to Uncle Ed's plantation home to spend the day.

A wonderful day it was with little cousins to match little visitors, and they played and played such fascinating

things as "I spy," "stealing goods," and "prisoner's base"; then creeping under the house which stood well above the ground, they blew and blew into little piles of sand, calling, "Doodle, doodle, doodle, you'll be late to get your supper," when a little wriggly bug or worm was sure to delight them by coming to the surface. Wonderful psychic phenomenon! Then the girls, with dollies in their arms, drifted away on the tide of young motherhood, while the boys strode off after the manner of men. There were four of them: Paul and Lonnie and Johnnie and Willie. On they went past the barn.

"Let's go down to the mill pond," exclaimed Lonnie, glancing furtively back as he did so to see if anybody was looking, for it was not greatly approved as a place for little boys to play.

"O, let's," came in chorus from the rest; so they raced down the long hill to the old mill, with its stagnant pond. There they threw stones and watched the circles widen until Lonnie further proposed that they go in swimming! This was enthusiastically agreed to. None of them had ever been in swimming or had seen any one swim, but what mattered that! They had heard about it, and one thing was certain, clothes must come off and the water be gotten into. So they speedily undressed and then looked at one another. Paul being the eldest, recognized that he must of course be leader, so in he bravely stepped. It was pretty wet, yes, but pshaw! you have to get wet when you swim. He went forward, step after step, the water rising higher and higher on his slim little body.

"Come on," he shouted back with great bravado, when lo, another step and he went instantly down, down out of sight. The others, who had begun to follow, scrambled back to the bank, screaming as they went, but no one was within hearing.

When the drowning boy came up, with instinctive alertness of mind he made a desperate plunge for the bank from which he had stepped, but caught his toe in the yielding earth only to have it crumble beneath him and under he went again. But the lunge forward had brought him nearer the bank, and as he came up a second time, once more desperately, he dug in a toe and tore at the water with his hands till he caught a foothold. Then, spent and breathless, he slowly made his way toward the bank

where the others, still shouting and screaming, pulled him out.

He lay awhile on the bank and the shivering children stood over him till he gathered breath again, then it was a chastened quartette that hustled into their clothes and started for the house. Lonnie suggested that they go round the big road, "so's Paul's hair'd get dry," and though no agreement was made, it was tacitly understood among them that "All's well that ends well," and "Least said soonest mended," but another proverb also proved to be in full force: "Murder will out."

About this period a shock came to Paul in a very unexpected way. He failed most ignominiously in some task his father had set him to do. But with a boy's usual sang-froid, being upbraided for it, he was taking the rebuke quite

philosophically when suddenly his father's keen eyes flashed fire, and he said with heat:

"You are an absolutely worthless boy, not to be depended upon for anything!"

Worthless! His father, who stood for all that was high in human character, his father, who was infallible in judgment, had found him worthless!

The boy moved at last, and went off to himself, a burden like a mill-stone fastened about his neck.

Several days brought no change, and the wise father observing regretfully (as parents must do, not having attained full perfection themselves), called the boy to him and in a casual way assigned him an unusual task, with —"I know it is going to be hard for you to do this just right; but then, you can

do *anything* that you want to do—you are just that kind of a boy!"

The heavens flashed light, and the young spirit leaped to hope and determination, not only for that task, but for many others in the life that followed.

At sight of the boy's speaking face, the father turned away with complete satisfaction.

VII

A MOVE

THE Shelton family lived in the little town of Crystal Springs. It was just after the war, the country was devastated and there was great unrest among the men who remained after the long carnage. One evening a man stopped at the door of the Shelton home and asked to stay all night. In those days such a request was not yet refused, so he came in. After the evening meal, as he sat and smoked with the preacher, he talked enthusiastically of the great state which he had lately made his home, Texas. He told of the vast plains of rich land just waiting for man to sow and reap. He told of its marvelous

possibilities. He had simply come back to tell his relatives and friends the glorious tale. Encouraged by the keen interest of the preacher, and upon hearty invitation, he remained several days. Mr. Seaman, the children's Uncle Ed, came over and listened too, with quickened hope. This was the beginning of a strong impelling toward Texas. Mrs. Shelton had demurred at first with the startled cry that she could not leave her people and ended with an oft reiterated, pathetic objection: there was a little grave in the country church-yard, how could she leave it!

Both Mr. and Mrs. Shelton's people were of the best families in the state. In legislative halls, in education, in things of culture and advancement they had been leaders, while for social intermingling they kept open homes after

the old-time southern fashion. Now, the young family of our story looked out from a pleasant country home upon broad acres of good rich land and abundant fruit orchards, with a pair of fine carriage horses and sturdy mules for the plantation work, and good barns for their housing.

But the general spirit of unrest, the disturbed and shiftless state of negro labor, the frequent, serious race riots, gave pointed appeal to the stranger's story and finally Mr. Shelton and Mr. Seaman, both preacher-planters, resigned their charges, sold their plantations, packed household goods and started with their families for the great southwest.

Such days of excitement and interest those were for the children. To Paul there came strange minor notes in his

boyhood's melody as he walked through the empty rooms which had been home, and his eyes were wet when he laid a hand upon his cow and dog for the last time, but the minor notes were soon lost in the gay chorus of expectation. They left home at nine o'clock one autumn night, and as he stood peering in the darkness for the head-light of the engine which was to bear them into the unknown, he was athrill with the elixir of real adventure. A wonderful trip it was across the low country, with flying telegraph poles and constantly changing landscape.

They knelt on the seats at the car windows by the hour watching things fly past. There were other children traveling with whom they made shy acquaintance, and all took frequent trips to the water cooler for the fun of almost

falling in the rocking, swaying aisles of the coach. Every meal was a picnic during which somebody was always crying, "Look there quick," and "O, see that!"

They stopped at last in the city of New Orleans. There they went to a big hotel, and life began to open up its possibilities. When his father took Paul by the hand and walked out with him at night, fairy-land burst upon him. The brightly lighted streets and stores, the gay display of color and many marvelous things which the window-lined pavements held up to view, the beautifully dressed people, laughing and talking gaily, the handsome carriages, with high stepping horses and shining harness, made a real wonderland for him. The boy was certainly in a new world.

Then the hour came when they went

to the wharf and took a steamer across the gulf to Galveston. Paul had heard this voyage talked of much, and in his excited interest, as he listened to stories of how the waves oft covered the ship, he expected to be much of the time under water, going through waves as one would a tunnel. But once upon her, the big ship seemed to ride high upon the rolling sea, mounting huge waves like a thing of life. A storm was soon in progress. How the long, dark wave-mounds raced on and on like monsters playing tag, to break at last in white, foaming spray which they threw from them in plume-like beauty. As Paul watched this rolling, seething sea it seemed the most wonderful, awe-some thing he had ever seen.

Then came the queer little beds where they were put to sleep,—and

sleep they did till the morning broke, bright and beautiful for them in Galveston Bay. When all were dressed his father took the children out upon deck where they looked for the first time upon Galveston. A gleaming, white city it was in the still morning brilliancy, gilded here and there by the golden sun, and a hush fell upon them all, while Paul turned with eager face, and said, "Father, it is almost like heaven, isn't it?"

VIII

IN TEXAS

AFTER some months of investigation and some wandering, the Shelton family finally settled in C——, Texas. The broad, rich prairie land of which they had heard was indeed there, but hardship and struggle were also a part of the new country's heritage. The family continued to grow, two more little girls, Ophelia and Allie, swelling the number to seven, and the history of that devoted mother during those years would require a tender hand.

Captain Pluck, whom we have followed in particular, still found things of interest on the right hand and on

the left. But the vast sweeping plains that stretched out and on till they lay in soft, blue rolls against the horizon made plaintive pressure upon his boyish spirit; the things he had known and loved were so far away, and undemonstrative laddie that he was concerning his inner feelings, it pressed in upon him at times in a way that was tragic with hopeless homesickness. Of this no one dreamed. Then, too, he had thought with triumph in leaving Mississippi, that he should leave behind Aunt Sofy's ghosts, but lo, he found them sometimes camped on the great lonely prairie!

Of course he found mates and one best chum, and good times for him grew apace. There was all the vast outdoors for enjoyment, and sports new and adventurous. Delicate combination of

tenderness and aggressive boyhood, he found some of the sport full hard at first. Hitherto he had known animals only to love them, but now birds were to be killed, squirrels and rabbits to be shot or trapped, and the sportsman waged war with the young nature lover. Going through a strip of woods one day a blue bird tilted and sang on the bough of a tree. Paul was carrying a stone, and the sportsman's blood being warm within him, he drew back his arm. The stone flew true and cruel. The bird fell at his feet, not with life mercifully ended, but limp and panting, mortally wounded in its pretty breast.

The boy's tender heart was wrung with anguish and gathering up the little bird he prayed desperately that it might live. He carried it home and all day

long he nursed it, giving it water and delicate bits of food. Toward evening he thought it seemed a bit better; eagerly he carried it back to the wood and placed it on a limb. It clung feebly with its little claws and he started away hoping to see it fly. But turning back as long as he could see it, it was still there, and in the morning when he came once more, it lay upon the ground, dead. He was alone in the wood and he lay down beside the little bird and sobbed out his remorse. He told no one, but for days and nights it haunted him. In the end, however, the sportsman conquered, for such is the cruel history of life.

It was about this time that he came home one day with swollen throat and bounding pulse, which proved fore-runners of measles, and when a week

later his disagreeable symptoms had subsided, he felt like a conquering general as he saw the other children drop into bed one by one, and felt that he had done it! O the contradictions of human nature as exemplified in unstudied boyhood!

IX

HUNTING PRAIRIE CHICKENS

ONE of Paul's first determinations after his arrival in Texas was to learn to shoot. As guns did not always come at a boy's bidding it was for awhile an unsolved problem how he was to learn. But neither are boys easily discouraged, and soon one of his chums produced an old Enfield rifle. It was hailed with great enthusiasm, and continued in active service with a double capacity, sending forth its effective fire from the barrel end, and viciously kicking the small gunner's shoulder in the rear at the same time. How bruised and sore those young shoulders were, but the gunners

changed from one to the other and endured heroically. Then Paul discovered and triumphantly brought out an old rifle of his grandfather's. It lacked a hammer, but what mattered that? All one had to do was provide a piece of iron and smash down on the explosive cap, sending out the load. Paul rigged it up and made the first shot. Resting the gun on a fence rail, he carefully sighted his target and banged down with his piece of iron on the cap, when lo, it proved also effective both in the front and rear. It sent forth a stream of burning powder upon the boy's left eye, which fortunately was closed as he aimed with the right. It was three months before the eye was again in good condition. This put a stop to the use of old rifles, as far as Paul was concerned, and his

father bought him a small rifle which he soon learned to handle with good skill.

Mr. Seaman's family had located a few miles out from the town of C——, where he had a big farm and preached to several country churches. It was one of Paul's greatest pleasures to be allowed to go out there for a visit. Lonnie and Johnnie were the best of mates for him and sport was abundant.

Paul on one occasion went out there to pick cotton. Help was short and the boys, Paul and Lonnie, eagerly attempted to make full hands. They shouldered their baskets and started down the big road to the field. As Paul swung along his eye was caught by something shining in the road-side dust. He stooped and there was a silver twenty-five cent piece; he pushed the

dust aside and a fifty cent piece was uncovered, and finally a ten cent piece! No finder of Captain Kidd's treasure was ever more elated. Inquiry failed to reveal the owner, and with the jingling silver in his trousers' pocket Paul worked all day like a Turk.

When his pile of cotton was weighed at nightfall to determine the amount of his pay it tipped the scales at ninety-five pounds.

"Ninety-five pounds," exclaimed Uncle Ed, "that's almost a man's work." And as he counted out the sum due into a dirty round palm, which already held the amount found in the morning, Uncle Ed chuckled and remarked dryly:

"Just as I said, you're always Captain Pluck and luck always goes with pluck."

The boys slept in the little lean-to of the farmhouse, and out from their window stretched to the left the great prairie, which was as yet uncultivated. It was covered with high grass and rustled softly with the constant prairie breeze, making low, sweet melody for sleeping. One autumn morning Paul wakened early, just as the dawn was breaking, and his ear, which seemed suddenly alert, caught a low, monotonous sound like the far-away beating of drums. He was startled at first and then with a glad, soft cry began to pommel Lonnie.

"Lonnie, Lonnie, wake up, isn't that prairie chickens?"

Lonnie's eyes flew open too, and he sat up in bed, ears intent.

"Yes, sir-ee, that's prairie chickens, sure as you live," he said.

Paul was all excitement, for Lonnie had told again and again about his wonderful experiences hunting prairie chickens, and life would never be at high water mark for Paul till he, too, had had a prairie chicken hunt. He had really slept with ears open all during this visit, listening for that drumming of the birds in the early morning.

"Get into your duds," said Lonnie, springing up, for once captain of an expedition by right of his previous experience.

Paul did not need urging, and both boys in a few minutes were dressed and ready for the start. They had not waked Johnnie, for they considered him too young. As he did not hold a like opinion they had been very quiet

in their movements and slipped out, guns in hand, without waking him.

Of course these doughty sportsmen always slept with their guns at hand for there was no knowing when game of some sort might appear and, as we have seen, they were on the alert even in sleep.

On they went through the yard and out upon the prairie, the distant sounds growing more distinct all the time, like the low beating of many muffled drums.

"There must be thousands and thousands of them," whispered Lonnie, excitedly.

"Well, I should say so," whispered Paul back.

"Wrap up your gun," said Lonnie, "this grass is awful wet," and both boys doubled the skirts of their rough

jackets over the locks of their guns to keep them dry. Then they dropped down in the tall grass and crept along half squatting, half crawling, without a word, for the birds must not be frightened off! The drumming grew more distinct with every step and after they had crept along for at least a mile, as Paul thought, Lonnie whispered "Wait," and the grass seemed to be fairly alive with them! But the clever birds hid themselves so successfully that the boys could not so much as get a glimpse of one.

How their hearts beat as they waited! It was almost maddening to be within arm's reach of the game and yet unable to get a shot. If they fired at random they would probably miss and the whole covey take flight before they could aim

again, for these two realized that they were not yet experts.

"O, Lonnie," at last breathed Paul, in tragic whisper. "There's a big hen squatting over there!"

Lonnie not ready to admit that Paul had spotted one first, whispered back:

"Pshaw! that's nothing but grass!" But as they waited and waited in an ecstasy of fear lest something should frighten the flock away, Lonnie finally agreed that Paul should shoot his hen, while Lonnie aimed his gun ready to fire the next jiffy, for the shot would start them instantly in the air.

Paul took steady aim at his hen, fired, and there was a whirr of wings like thunder on every side, while it seemed to the boys that the air was black with the multitude of birds.

"Bang! Bang!" went Lonnie's gun,

and "Bang!" went Paul's second barrel.

Of course before the boys could reload their guns the frightened birds had winged their way far into the distance, and the two could only stand and gaze regretfully after them, sailing away like ever-changing, soft, gray clouds.

But perhaps they had shot something! This thought brought them to earth and they excitedly searched about in the long grass for possible trophies.

Suddenly Lonnie laughed out in high derision. "Come see your prairie hen!" And Paul went up to find an old, rusty tin pan which had been left on the prairie and was battered into a shape something like a chicken. Paul was not the first nor the last hunter to be deceived in a similar way.

But just beyond the counterfeit hen

lay two fine, plump prairie chickens, which Paul's second barrel had undoubtedly brought down, and he was in high feather. While search as he would in the direction of his shots, Lonnie could only find one small bird.

"You're always old 'Cap'n Luck'," said Lonnie grudgingly. This was a perversion of Uncle Ed's name which the boys gave Paul as occasion seemed to make it fitting.

As the two eager sportsmen came marching into the yard with their game, the household was fully astir, and all were warm in praise of their success, while the boys could hardly wait till dinner time for their chickens to be served.

X

BEN

PAUL'S best chum was Ben Merrit. It goes without saying that they were contrasts in temperament: Paul a lover of books and born investigator, Ben a jolly boy, usually bent on a good time. The two found themselves merry over trifles and enjoyed it. When Paul went to Ben's house to dinner or to spend the night, and when Ben went to Paul's, they sat down with much decorum at the table while the young visitor, whichever one it happened to be, replied demurely to queries as to whether he would have some of this or that, and the boy who was at home was simply overcome with the company

manners of the other. One glance exchanged between them was enough to set them off in irrepressible merriment, which was hard on the final preservation of company manners.

Dr. Merrit, Ben's father, had a certain droll humor and liked to add some teasing to his small guest's embarrassment when Paul was there.

"Will you have some fried chicken, Paul," he asked on one occasion, and that being one of Paul's special favorites, he replied promptly, if not with vigor:

"Yes, sir, thank you," at the same time lifting his plate to pass it on.

"Well, I'm sorry," said Dr. Merrit gravely, "but we haven't any to-day."

Ben almost collapsed with laughter and Paul joined him in spite of furious blushes.

The two boys went to school together, Mr. Shelton having opened a good village school, and there were expeditions of all sorts which they shared in play hours.

Such wonderful balloons of wire and tissue paper they made, and sent up by means of a lighted alcohol sponge, which sailed the sky majestically; such marvelous kites, from paper and bits of wood! And when one actually flew far away into the sky, tugging at its string in a firm brown hand like a living thing, life was ecstasy. Then Paul would dread having to grow up and be a man! As he looked about he saw nothing in the life of a man to compare with kite flying, balloon sailing, hunting, fishing, trapping!

The boys worked for days over bird traps and dead falls. There was one

trap which they made with small pieces of wood. Laying four strips down, crossed at the ends forming a square, they tied the corners firmly together. Just within these they laid four others weaving them into one another at the corners, and continuing round and round they built it up growing smaller all the time till the apex was one short piece laid on top, and the whole was held together by a stout, pliable switch passed over it and tied firmly at the sides. The trap was raised at one side and rested upon an upright piece with a trigger, whose treacherous end lay beneath the trap with crumbs or corn scattered about it, so when the unsuspecting bird hopped about picking up food and the trigger was disturbed ever so little, down the trap would come caging the game.

The night they first set it up was an exciting one. They could hardly wait for morning to come. Before breakfast both were out there and oh, joy, a plump partridge was housed within!

When they reached Paul's house the two boys after much labor succeeded in dressing their game, and then before the open fire they suspended it by a wire attached above and roasted it, turning and basting faithfully, with many consultations as to best methods and frequent reference to Mrs. Shelton while the children were most interested spectators. At last it was juicy and brown, and no king ever found greater satisfaction in a royal dinner, than those two boys in theirs that day, while every child had at least a taste.

For some time afterward they set the trap regularly, going every morning

the first thing to see if they had caught anything,—perhaps finding a bird, but oftener not. Finally the novelty was gone, and after setting it one night they went off home and both forgot all about it. Neither went to look after it for several days, and then Paul happening to be in the woods remembered the trap. All was still when he came to it, but it had been sprung and lifting it carefully he saw two pretty, brown partridges lying dead beneath it. O, how his heart smote him! They had starved to death: Trapped without food they had suffered and suffered till death came! He threw the trap away, and Ben could not persuade him to trap any more birds.

One Friday afternoon the two boys went off jubilant with an uncle of Ben's to spend Saturday and Sunday, return-

ing in time for school Monday morning. It was a red letter event of their lives. The weather was beautiful, crisp October weather, and when the two were mounted on shaggy mustang ponies Saturday morning bright and early, while two eager hunting dogs, slender greyhounds, Sport and Fleet, waited their word of command, the flood tide of exhilaration was in.

Mr. Middleton chuckled with hearty appreciation of the boys' enjoyment as he saw them start off after final instructions as to how to manage the hunt, and when they came at night-fall with a string of rabbits, and, oh, so deliciously tired, he praised them generously.

Next morning small legs were unwontedly sore and stiff, but jubilant spirits were still at high tide.

"Now boys," said Mr. Middleton, "this is the Sabbath you know, but we haven't any churches out this way, for which I am sorry. So, after prayers this morning, you can take the mustangs for a ride, but no hunting to-day, you understand."

The boys, of course, readily assented, for they wouldn't hunt on Sunday, and mounted their ponies with no vain desires. The dogs, however, were sorely disappointed when bidden to remain at home. Down the road Paul and Ben cantered, rehearsing events of the day before with great enjoyment. They had been gone about half an hour perhaps, when there was a sudden bark and swift rush from the road behind them, and Sport and Fleet leaped into the prairie grass at their side! Almost instantly the long ears of a jack-rabbit

came up from the grass off on the prairie. The boys were too much astonished to halt the dogs at first, and the hunt with all its exciting interest was on before they knew it. The mustangs were ploughing the grass and they were eagerly watching the race between dogs and rabbit. Sport was a mongrel, not quite first class, larger than the true greyhound and with a tawny brown coat, while Fleet was a full-blooded greyhound, true to the death, swift, unerring. He was his owner's pride.

Sport had spotted the rabbit first and made the first dash, so he took the lead. The rabbit scenting trouble, but not yet sure from whence it came, made a long lope, then paused to listen, his big, long ears showing plainly above the grass. Another lope and pause to listen, and

another, then with growing alarm, longer, swifter leaps and fewer pauses to reconnoiter, till at last with full realization of danger he laid his long ears back on his shoulders and fell into long, flying leaps that carried him far ahead of Sport. On, on he went, the distance constantly increasing between him and the dog, while Fleet bringing up the rear steadily gained on the two. Soon the three mounted a ridge and sped along its rim, making a perfect moving picture for the boys.

The rabbit was winning, yes, as far as Sport was concerned, but Fleet! O, Fleet was passing Sport, and gaining on the rabbit every second! The boys were flying along at the base of the ridge upon their ponies and nearing every instant the scene of the finale. There, Fleet almost has him! But no,

the rabbit knows well his tactics, he turns suddenly down the ridge and Fleet bounds over him! Then instantly recovering himself he, too, turns down the ridge easily overtaking his victim, but again and again the rabbit eludes him leaving the dog to bound over as he turns aside.

Paul dashes up on his pony just in time to see this final thrilling by-play.

A rush from the dog and he is upon the rabbit! A quick turn, a long leap, and the rabbit is safe, while the dog bounds past, sometimes turning a head-long somersault.

Another rush, another quick turn and long leap! Another and another and another.

But each time the leaps are feebler, the dog has superior strength, and there is only one end of it all for the little

prairie king. Fleet has him at last just as Ben and Sport dash up. The well trained dogs wait the word of command, and one look at the helpless, quivering, frightened thing made Paul cry out as he flung himself from the mustang.

"Wait Fleet! Wait Sport," he commanded, stooping and taking the trembler in his arms while the dogs fell back.

Ben had also dismounted and he, too, knelt and patted the poor rabbit's back.

"It's Sunday," said Paul softly, "let's turn him loose."

"Yes, let's," returned Ben.

So they put the little fellow down unhurt, and while they held the astonished dogs in stern command, started him off with uncertain, timid lopes, which grew in strength and confidence till he disappeared over the ridge.

The little cavalcade started off again, and with consciences quite at rest because they had let the rabbit go, the boys gave themselves up to enjoyment of a review of the fine race which they had witnessed. They failed to give instructions to the dogs, however, and soon another race was on, exciting as the other, to which they bent with eager eyes and swift ponies. This time just as Fleet was upon the rabbit, the little prairie king disappeared through a barbed wire fence and Fleet plunged after. But oh, the fence through which the rabbit slipped with ease, held Fleet in a cruel grip! When the boys had reached him, and after much difficulty extricated his right shoulder, they found a muscle torn out completely.

The poor dog yelped piteously, and two thoroughly frightened boys lifted

him upon Paul's mustang in front of the saddle, then with great care and anxiety Paul carried him home.

Not a word was said as they rode along, the beauty of the Sabbath morning was gone, and even the joy of yesterday's hunt, to say nothing of those of to-day, passed into nothingness.

When they reached the house Mr. Middleton, who had been watching, came up and took his beloved dog from them with firmly set lips, and it required all Paul's stamina to make what he knew must seem a lame explanation.

Hoping to help matters some, Ben put in:

"But, uncle, we truly didn't know the dogs had followed us till they rushed off after the rabbit."

"The first rabbit," said Mr. Middleton, laconically.

"But we might have stopped them any time," said Paul, so sorrowfully that Mr. Middleton, knowing the accident might also have happened at any time, said:

"Well, boys, it was a great temptation to you and the dogs. I should have shut them up so they could not follow. This poor fellow will never run another race and you will not forget your lesson as long as he lives."

And rest assured they did not. Paul, or Ben either, would have gone blocks out of the way rather than meet the beautiful, limping greyhound when Mr. Middleton brought him to town, as he frequently did, for the man's devotion to the wounded dog was unbounded; and whenever the fine fellow leapt up brokenly in eager recognition of them, it was almost more than they could bear.

XI

WILD GOOSE HUNTING

MR. SEAMAN had become restless under some conditions against which he had to struggle and moved with his family some hundred miles away to the town of B——. In about six months, pleased with Mr. Seaman's report of the new location, Mr. Shelton and family followed.

This time the children were not so eager to go, they each had their playmates and it was hard to leave them. An artist who wished to portray pathos in controlled simplicity should have seen the leave-taking between Paul and Ben; and in the new home Paul missed his mate at times with almost tragic

longing,—all the more intense because he could not speak of it even to his mother. He did not visit the tea cake jar with relish, as he once did, and the ghosts seemed more persistent than ever in the new locality!

But there is sure rebound in the normal boy and new interests speedily claimed Paul's attention.

Once when on a visit to Uncle Ed's, who was again located in the country, a trip had to be made some miles away. Mr. Seaman was going with the ox team and proposed to take the two boys, Paul and Lonnie, with him. Both were wild with delight over the prospect. When they started off, guns and ammunition were, of course, a part of the equipment, for there was no knowing but what a buffalo, or a deer, a rabbit, or a partridge anyhow, might cross

their path any time according to Lonnie; and there proved to be some game within reach, which added much to the zest of the trip, but by far the best thing that came their way was the wild goose hunt.

It was in a bit of low, marshy country, with frequent small ponds, through which they were going when Mr. Seaman suddenly said:

"Hush, boys!" and raised his hands for silence. A peculiar cry, a sort of ringing, nasal quack was repeated and he exclaimed, "Wild geese as sure as you live," and instantly called "Whoa," to the team.

"Boys, what do you say to a wild goose hunt?" he asked as seriously as if very uncertain of their agreement.

"Fine, fine," exclaimed both at once with great enthusiasm. Then, "How

do you do it?" "Where are the geese?" and like excited questions followed thick and fast.

"Well," said Uncle Ed, going to a little clump of trees; "the first thing is to make your goose-blind." And with the two boys at his heels asking questions, he cut down a small tree, took a section and split it open. Then he trimmed the ends nice and smooth for runners, and tied the two together with stout branches for cross pieces, forming a pretty good sled. Then he piled on some leafy branches and the "goose-blind" was ready.

A hole had been left in the middle of the brush and Mr. Seaman said, "Cap'n Pluck, you're the oldest and a pretty good shot, I guess we'll send you out first." Lonnie looked a bit crest-fallen, but said nothing.

"But what am I to do?" exclaimed Paul, bewildered, for Uncle Ed did not always explain; things simply moved along when he was in charge. In another minute Paul found himself on the sled, seated in the opening in the middle of the brush, gun in hand. Uncle Ed carefully pulled up the brush about him, fastened the oxen to the sled and then walking beside, drove them off from the road a good distance.

"Now, Cap'n, this thing won't scare the geese a bit, keep well down in the brush and they will let you come right by them. Let the oxen graze along and when you get a good chance at a goose, shoot."

Mr. Seaman walked back to the wagon and he and Lonnie sat down in the shade and waited. Paul was in a

quiver of excitement, but kept his gun steady, ready to fire any instant.

The oxen, delighted with the change in things for them, browsed along contentedly, and Paul thought they never would get where there were any geese. It was hours and hours, he knew, that he sat and watched, but Uncle Ed said afterward, it was three fourths of one, and then that peculiar "quack, quack," from the bushes close to a shallow pond toward which the oxen were slowly grazing. Paul's excitement had subsided with the long wait, but he was instantly a'quiver again, and so intently gazing in the direction from whence he had heard them, that he did not notice the oxen were quietly making their way into the pond. On they went into the cool water, and at that instant there was a loud "Quack,

quack," again and several geese, stretching out their long necks, came running to the water's edge.

"Bump," went the tree-sled as it slid down a short incline into the shallow pond, boy, gun and all, but "Bang!" went the gun at the same instant, and when Uncle Ed came running up almost out of breath, he found Paul scrambling out of the brush and water with his gun and crying:

"I got one, I got one! See here, Uncle Ed," and sure enough he had brought down a big, gray goose just at the edge of the water.

Uncle Ed laughed when he got his breath and said:

"Well, Cap'n Pluck, you did. But what in the world did you let the oxen carry you into the pond for? Why

didn't you halt them before they got in?"

Paul looked around blankly, for the first time taking in the situation.

"I don't believe you even knew you were wet," laughed his uncle.

"I didn't," said the boy. "I never knew they went in the pond." And he looked ruefully down at his wet clothes.

"Well, this sun will soon dry them," said Uncle Ed, "and when we get home we'll have baked goose for sure."

XII

A PRINTER'S DEVIL

PAUL spent his first year in the new town mainly in school work with plenty of play sandwiched in. Mr. Shelton had again taken up teaching and had a prosperous school while he organized a church of his faith and carried it forward with good success.

Paul studied with avidity and easily shot to the head of his class. He was slender and looked rather frail, so his father laughed and said to his mother:

"I can't keep that boy's mind within proper, wholesome limits. I believe I will take him out of school for a year, and get him a place as messenger boy somewhere, which, while keeping him

busy and out of mischief, will at the same time give him exercise in the open air. I must confess, too, it will help me out financially. Flora and Blanche ought to go to college and I must manage to send them, somehow."

After careful consideration this course was decided upon, and when presented to eleven-year-old Paul, was eagerly agreed to.

That very day there was a knock at The Bugle's office door and the big voiced, "Come in" brought to view so young a boy that one keen look from beneath the editor's shaggy brows might have vanquished the caller had not his spirit been much bigger than his body.

As it was he held his head erect and inquired with business-like directness if he might get some work to do there.

"Well, Bub, we ain't needing much

help just about now unless it is a devil —do you think you'd make a first class devil?"

The men of the printing office laughed heartily for they saw the boy knew nothing of the province of a "printer's devil."

"No, sir," he replied stoutly, "I wouldn't be a devil for anybody. But there's lots of things I can do. I can run errands, sweep and,—scrub," he concluded stoutly.

There was another roar from the men, which bewildered the boy, but he stood his ground firmly.

The editor was a big-hearted, big-bodied, typical Texan pioneer and he said kindly at last:

"Well, Bub, we have to wait on ourselves here generally, but we're powerful busy just now getting ready for that

Democratic State Convention first of July, printing posters and hurrahing 'em up, and if you don't expect the salary of a Jay Gould and know how to make yourself useful, you can pitch in for three weeks. Be here in the morning at seven sharp."

That evening at supper Paul announced that he had found a place, to the astonishment of his father and mother.

"What to do?" demanded his father.

"To be messenger boy, I reckon," he added hesitatingly, "at The Bugle office." And before his father could reply, he asked:

"Father, what's a devil at a printing office? Not anything bad is it?"

His father smiled and explained that a printer's devil was the boy who did general work and ran errands.

"That's what they meant then when they all laughed at me. Well, I don't like the name, but I'm going to be a good devil, anyway."

Mr. Shelton went to The Bugle office with him next day and arranged matters definitely for him, while Paul began work at once. It was understood that the engagement was for only three weeks till the convention was over, which Mr. Shelton liked as it would give opportunity for a test of the plan.

Each morning found Paul on time at The Bugle office, and though the young arms and legs often grew tired at their tasks, he did not falter and the men generally were kindly. He did seem small and slight for some of the office work, but there was a certain sturdiness about him physically, after all, and being quick to learn he soon inked the rollers

well, cleaned them and the forms carefully, while for errands and delivery of papers he proved an expert.

Usually the paper was delivered through the mail but in view of the coming convention the business men, lawyers, shops and railroad offices must get the paper Friday afternoon instead of Saturday morning, thereby antedating The Clarion. The Clarion was a rival paper and with The Bugle was struggling hard for a foothold in the town, which could really support only one weekly paper.

Paul had not been on The Bugle staff two days before he was heart and soul for its interests. He worked with the spirit he had hitherto played, always to win. So loyal was he that the men soon dubbed him "Little Bugle." The old "printer's devil" had never

seemed to quite fit Paul, and "Little Bugle" took the place of Captain Pluck for a time.

When he started out for his first delivery Friday afternoon, Mr. Strong said, good-naturedly:

"You may have all you can make selling extras, to folks not regular subscribers, I mean, at ten cents each."

The Bugle came high by single copies, but it was a time when everything was high, and the south and southwest for many years after the war had only two small coins in circulation, the nickel and the dime.

Paul always carried in his pocket a musical whistle, to fill otherwise dull moments, which had no part in his conception of life, and with a bulging bundle of papers went everywhere whistling shrilly and calling out,

"Here's your Bugle, best paper in the state," and somehow the small enthusiastic face won everywhere; besides it was a new thing for the town to have papers sold on the street, and novelties are taking.

At the closing hour in the office that evening the old-fashioned press with its clumsy moving platform and hand lever, was at last at rest; the monotonous rattle of the job presses had ceased, and the men were getting coats and hats preparing to leave when Mr. Strong came into the composing room, saying impatiently:

"Where's that little rascal? I expect he's forgotten all about his papers and gone off playing ball somewhere. Has anybody seen him lately?"

"He's been in an' out o' here all the evenin'," said the foreman, "toatin' off

all the papers he could lug ev'ry time."

"Is that so?" said Mr. Strong. "Well, I guess I'll wait for him awhile then," and went back to his desk.

It was not many minutes before young, swift feet were heard springing up the stairs, and then Paul stood before Mr. Strong, his eyes rivaling the brilliancy of the copper tips on his well worn shoes, and every nerve and muscle tingling with the elixir of success. He was, in fact, the electrified embodiment of a bloated bond holder,—his small trousers' pockets literally heavy with jingling dimes!

Taking them out by the handful, he stacked them up on the desk before Mr. Strong, who gave a long whistle!

"Everybody wants The Bugle," exclaimed Paul.

And Mr. Strong said at last: "Well,

you're great," as he stuffed the dimes back into the small pockets.

When Paul reached home flying on the wings of the wind, and the dimes were stacked up on mother's sewing table with the regular weekly pay, three shining round dollars, Paul's hilarity was something astonishing.

When the next delivery afternoon came round Mr. Strong remarked to Paul:

"Look here, Little Bugle, you're a hustler from Hustleville—that's all right, but I guess we'll have to divide profits on these extra sales," to which Paul readily agreed.

The second Friday afternoon was a repetition of the first, and Paul's heart beat high again as he divided proceeds with the editor with a goodly sum left for himself. He stopped on the way

home at an enticing confectionery beneath the office and invested fifteen cents in some striped candy which had lured him all the week, and ten in a beautiful candy lady for mother.

With both precious p a c k a g e s wrapped and in his hand, he was starting down the street for home when Mr. Strong stopped him:

"Two Bugle issues a day for the convention next week, what do you think of that, my boy?"

"That's fine, Mr. Strong. O, we'll beat The Clarion, that's dead sure."

Mr. Strong laughed and went on. All the men in the office loved to stir Paul up about The Bugle.

When he reached home the great prospects of The Bugle were his first thought.

"O mother," he called before he got

to the house, "The Bugle will have two issues a day next week! Just think of it! Why The Clarion will be left so far behind it can never catch up. I just know they *can't* have two issues a day!"

His mother had to remind him that he knew very little of the possibilities of The Clarion.

"O, but mother, you don't know the work that it is to get out one issue a week, and there's mighty few that can undertake to get out one a *day*, but The Bugle can get *two* out, Mr. Strong says so!"

And mother saw that things were at too high a tide for argument, particularly after the dimes were stacked up, the week's pay, the striped candy and the sugar lady were brought forth,

while all the children capered in joy about the feast.

Next morning at the office everything was at high tension making ready for the following Monday, and it was not long before Paul learned that The Clarion would issue three editions a day! This was staggering news, and even he was sobered. It was felt on all sides that the paper which made the best showing during the convention would be the permanent winner.

Mr. Strong was giving orders here and there before going off to an adjoining town in search of more help to match The Clarion's advance plan. At last he exclaimed impatiently:

"I won't have time now to look up men for selling papers next week, I meant to do that to-day, but having to go off for another printer, I simply can't

do it." His eyes fell upon Paul as he said this.

"Here boy," he commanded, and Paul came with a bound. "Could you get a squad of a dozen boys, every one first class and warranted to stick, that could sell papers for me next week?"

"Yes, sir," said Paul confidently. He knew how well the boys had responded to his leadership in play and he felt that they would follow him still, though he did not consciously reason it out in this way.

"Well, now remember," and Mr. Strong glared at him almost savagely, "I depend on you to have those boys here this evening at six for inspection, —and to take oath," he added, his grimness lighting up a little. "You can have this afternoon off to muster them in."

Responsibilities were increasing and it was a much sobered boy that dropped in to see mother a minute, and make the humiliating confession that The Clarion would issue *three* editions a day next week!

Then it was mother's turn to question this dread possibility, and for once to lift drooping spirits.

When the office closing hour came, Paul and his boys were on hand. Mr. Strong expressed satisfaction with the squad, and looked much relieved as he had also found a good recruit for the printing.

Then the great day came, bringing crowds of people with drums beating and flags flying. The town had never known such excitement before. Convention sessions were held in the Methodist church about one half mile

from The Bugle office. Paul and his squad of boys were constantly on the go between the two places, or shouting their papers among the crowd about the door. Mr. Strong did not have time to direct them, but he noted that Paul had them all under his eye, managing them with good generalship. The Clarion had a force of men, who were doing good work also selling papers, and with three issues a day for both, the race must be a close one between them.

Not only was the newspaper race hot, but the political contest was also, two strong candidates in the field making the race wildly exciting, while the weather following suit was likewise scorching hot.

On the second day of the Convention when all was intense excitement, doors, windows and every available outlet

"packed and jammed," men opened their collars and shirts at the neck, threw off coats and panted in the heat. An idea struck Paul! He rushed off after another bundle of papers, and came back with all he could carry under one arm and a huge bundle of big palmetto fans under the other! When he entered the church there were cries at once of "Here, here," "This way," and not one purchased a fan (for ten cents) without hearing, "Bugle, Bugle, best paper in the state!"

Paul soon had his entire squad armed with fans as well as papers, and when an hour or two later the perspiring chairman beckoned him to the platform to make a purchase somebody called out:

"Bugle, Bugle, best paper in the state! Three cheers for Little Bugle and his fans!" The crowd was demon-

strative, in the best of humor that moment, and was instantly in an uproar, while nobody cheered more wildly than Mr. Strong at his desk, forgetting it was not the part of modesty. After that The Clarion seemed to drop out of sight, everybody wanted The Bugle.

That evening The Clarion's owner met Paul on his way home, ostensibly by accident, and after some very friendly remarks, inquired what The Bugle paid him a week.

Paul hesitated a minute then said decidedly, "That is something I don't want to tell."

"Well," said the man a little nettled, "whatever they pay you I will double it. We know how to appreciate good work at The Clarion."

"No, sir," said Paul, "I love The Bugle and I am going to stay with it."

Indeed he could not have been bought at any price, and the pile of dimes on his mother's table from the sale of papers and fans when the convention was over, eclipsing all previous piles, certainly indicated an affluence calculated to foster independence.

But Paul did not forget that Mr. Strong had positively said he could only have the place three weeks. So when Saturday night came, he stood before the editor and said a little falteringly:

"You will not want me after to-night, I suppose, Mr. Strong. That was what you said when I came."

"Not want you," thundered Mr. Strong. "Not want you! Well, I guess we will! As long as The Bugle runs we will want you here."

So Paul became a fixture in The Bugle office for the time being, and so alert was he in mind, so interested in every new thing, that he was soon setting type along with the regular printers much of the time, and then he fell sick. After a week or two of fever Mr. Shelton laughed:

"I'll have to change that boy again, he will keep learning things. I didn't put him in that office to become a printer, it's too confining. I shall have to take him away."

So that ended Paul's work as Printer.

XIII

A NORTHER AND A PRAIRIE FIRE

THE boys made another trip with Mr. Seaman that autumn which widened their experience of life on the prairies of the southwest. They went some fifty miles away and took four days for the trip, camping out a night each way. Aunt Ophelia, Mr. Seaman's wife, was afraid for them to go, as it had been very dry and she feared a prairie fire, but he looked out at some gathering clouds and said that the prospect was they would get caught in a rain storm instead. So the interesting preparations went on. Blankets had to be provided, for there was no telling

about Texas weather, and provisions to last for several days. There was always sure to be something doing when you went with Uncle Ed, and the boys, Paul and Lonnie, started off in high spirits.

The clouds which had been noticed before they started, scattered and drifted away, the wind died down and it was extremely sultry. Along toward dark Paul looked over to the northwest and asked:

"Is that a wagon coming, Uncle Ed?"

His uncle turned, looking intently, and as he looked the black thing which Paul had noticed grew rapidly.

"A norther," exclaimed Uncle Ed, "as sure as you live!" And the black monster swiftly spread, sending out dark couriers in every direction, followed by vast battalions of billowy

clouds, through which weird flashes of lightning played.

"Get your overcoats and close the wagon curtains," he cried, "I think rain is coming."

The boys worked fast, but were none too quick, for in an incredible space of time, almost, there came a few drops of rain, and then a mighty surging of the grass with a rushing as of the sound of many waters, while the horses shivered and the little party suffered intensely from the cold. Fortunately, as they thought, the rain did not continue, for with such a severe norther in progress the situation would have been dangerous, as lives have been lost on the prairie in such experiences.

It was a night of real hardship for them, however, for when they camped, that is unhitched and tethered their

horses to the back of the wagon, they dared not make a fire, but eating their supper in darkness, wrapped themselves in blankets and slept as best they could. Mr. Seaman had cheered the boys all he could with good-humored banter, but chattering teeth did not add zest to the effort.

By the next morning the norther had moderated to a comfortable, brisk temperature and they started off in good spirits again. Mr. Seaman would have felt more content if the slow rain which he had expected had come. He realized, in going over the prairie, as he had not before how very dry the grass was, and felt in haste to have the trip over and be at home once more. It would not help matters to start back when they reached B—— and his business was done, for it would give them two

nights probably to camp out, so they remained overnight, and started early the following morning. As they journeyed on, making good speed as they could, a haziness grew into rather dense, even clouds, though no rain fell. About the middle of the afternoon Lonnie looked over at the west and said:

"Papa, I don't believe its going to rain this time either, there is a bright streak over there like it was going to clear up."

His father looked and drew in his breath sharply. He knew what that brilliant strip meant: a prairie fire! The thing he had been dreading.

"Boys," he said quietly, "now I expect you two to be pluckies sure enough, both of you, if I hadn't thought you would be I wouldn't have brought you along. That's a prairie fire coming,

but I think we are not far from the bayou region, and I am going for it with all speed."

He had already given the horses a tingling blow and sent them forward, he now pressed them to their utmost.

The boys said never a word but did their best not to disappoint him. All looked back, now and then, as the great pyrotechnic spectacle was unfolded, grand, beautiful, awful in the extreme. The long, low rolls of flame widened and glowed, the heavens gave back answering flame and a dense pall of smoke completed the moving picture.

After a two mile race the road began to slope down and they knew they were getting into the bayou region. On, on they went straight into the biggest one, then handing out matches, Mr. Seaman said to the boys:

"Set fire to the grass on every side fast as you can." They looked in wonder for a minute, wasn't fire what they were trying to get away from? But without a word they flew to do his bidding. Soon flames were rushing to meet the oncoming holocaust.

The horses reared and snorted, but Mr. Seaman stood at their heads waist deep in the water and held them at last in trembling quiet.

The boys came back, waded in and climbed into the back of the wagon while the tragedy went on. They were so enveloped in smoke for awhile that they could see nothing before them, and thought they must surely suffocate, but the air gradually grew clearer and all danger past before night settled upon them.

They again ate in darkness, for there was nothing in their reach unburned from which to make a fire, and they were a sober little party which Mr. Seaman did not try to cheer, for he was too worn out with exertion and anxiety. All slept soundly in spite of some fear that the house and barns might go in the fire which had swept on toward home, but every precaution had previously been taken there, the grass mowed for a mile away from the house in the one direction which looked off toward the prairie.

When they came within view of its chimneys and sloping roof it was a sight good to see, and as they drove up to the gate, Mrs. Seaman was equally rejoiced to see them.

"Well," said Uncle Ed, "we were all

pretty good pluckies and luckies,—especially the lucky part,—for which thank God," he added as he kissed his wife.

XIV

A TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

AS the fine fall weather came on and the girls once more started for college, Paul, twelve years of age, found a place as messenger boy in the telegraph office at $25 a month.

The same vim and interest went into the new business with him. They greatly regretted losing him at The Bugle office and made him a life subscriber, while he still felt paternal interest in its affairs, but this did not prevent his taking the business of telegraph messenger fully into his heart, and soon becoming a trusted attaché.

Not only did the station officials find him a trusty messenger, but a leading

merchant of the town observing him as he went hither and thither, put into his hands some unyielding bills which he might collect as he met delinquent people or was in their locality, giving him twenty-five per cent on all such hopeless collections. And Mr. McCamel, a canny Scotchman, chuckled contentedly over the small boy's success where he himself had repeatedly failed.

One day the train dispatcher came out on the station platform with a troubled look.

"Hang it!" he exclaimed, "now I've held up that freight at the water tank to wait for the passenger to pass, and I've just learned it's been delayed some six hours by an accident. The freight's already left A—— and I can't wire them again. That's a mess."

Then noticing Paul, he said:

"Look here, Captain, you're just the fellow I want. What do you say to going out on an engine about six miles to the water tank and staying till the freight comes along? The engine will have to come right back, you know, and leave you."

Paul thought a minute.

"Will the freight be sure to stop?"

"O, yes, it will have to stop there to water, besides I've wired it to stop there."

"All right," said Paul.

So the engine was made ready and the one small passenger, with his important message, taken up to the water tank.

Paul enjoyed the trip hugely, sitting upon the engineer's seat in front and plying him with questions every inch

of the way, which were good-humoredly answered.

The water tank was situated in a lonely wood with the nearest habitations in the town of B——, six miles away. He must wait some hours for the freight; it was already late afternoon and Paul's spirits drooped a little as the engine drew away, and the friendly face of the engineer faded from sight. He even felt a bit panicky for a while, but remembering that his father had said once he did not want a coward for a son, he gathered up his courage. There were wild beasts in the woods, he knew,—bears, wild cats, and with only the coal shed for refuge. Then, as darkness dropped slowly down, what should happen but that Aunt Sofy's three ghosts, the big tall one and the two small ones on each side,

all dressed in the whitest and coldest white, like nothing on earth, should station themselves in the dark, silent wood!

To make matters worse, there had been a railroad accident not far from the water tank, and Paul had heard trainmen declare that they had seen repeatedly, when passing there, the ghost of the conductor who was killed at the time! How he shivered and anxiously peered here and there in the darkness!

Right sturdily, however, he stood his ground and was not molested by things terrestrial or celestial, and when the freight pulled up to the water tank, nobody suspected that the little messenger boy had been through mental tragedy.

An experience of real danger came to him a few days later.

The station platform was being extended and the sleepers were laid, but not yet covered, when Paul attempted a foolish, boyish feat,—to board a moving train from this unfinished part of the platform. In looking carefully to his footing, which he had to do, he failed to grasp the car rail firmly and was thrown directly upon the track between two moving cars! But for that alert mind of his he must have been instantly killed. With a flirt like a fish, almost simultaneous with the fall, he threw himself from the track and lay on the ends of the ties which pressed against the sleepers of the unfinished platform, till the long train passed above him. Then he got up, white and shaken, but mercifully unhurt.

The men who witnessed it held their breath, but shouted, "Good for you, Captain Pluck," as he got up unhurt. The old nickname was always readily caught up by new associates.

Paul's position as messenger boy took him all over town, and the little place, at first fifty miles from a railroad, had grown under his young eye from the court house square with a fringe of stores around, and scattering dwelling houses beyond, to a hustling, full-fledged western town. The railroad had come sweeping past the first year the Shelton's were there, and after it the town came on like a whirlwind, bringing in its train new business houses, hotels, saloons, and all the paraphernalia of evil against which the little church Mr. Shelton had organized, and several of other denomina-

tions, were vigorously pushing forward. The town having thus come up under the young eye of Paul, when he delivered telegrams there was no address that he could not easily find. Some of the messages took him to saloons and gambling houses, some to homes of the painted women of the time. He knew the nature of the places —but of what concern was that to him, a wholesome boy with all the moving pictures of nature and life and fun before him? What interest was there for him behind screened doorways from which came discordant, angry voices, and high, strident laughter? Or, stopping with a message at the door of a house of mystery and glimpsing a haggard, or painted, smirking face, what had it to do with him? Simply nothing: he knew them all as he did

prairie fires and cyclones, and wanted much less to do with them.

From one experience he had at this time it was not strange that the places for drink should be associated with things as undesirable as cyclones. It was one afternoon, almost twilight, that he was delivering a telegram on the edge of town, when he was suddenly conscious of people running in great excitement, and soon there appeared around the corner three furiously galloping horsemen, with huge pistols in their hands, which they shot terrifyingly in the air while they whooped and threatened everybody as they went. The center man, bigger and rougher than the others, cried out as he passed the startled boy, "Send yer Sheriff! Let 'im 'rest me if he dares!" Then unmolested, the man drew up to a saloon

and ordered a bottle of whiskey brought out to him, while the people standing about in terrified groups, whispered that it was Bill Hearn, the outlaw who had been shooting up the country 'round, taking deadly aim at innocent Negroes working in the fields, and killing any one who dared remonstrate. That was the sort of thing a Texas boy might see in the pioneer towns where whiskey flowed freely and was the source of much outlawry. These were things, then, with which Paul had no part nor lot.

But often, as he came back from delivering messages there were, perhaps, groups of boys eyeing keenly a blooming watermelon lying on the pavement just beneath a grocer's window, and then the cry came involuntarily from

him, or some other boy, "Let's plug for it!"

Quicker than a flash a group lined up on the outer edge of the side-walk, jack-knives were out in a twinkling, and the big blades balancing at their tips from sturdy boy fingers. Then, with clever swing and throw, the blades flew toward the great melon, one after the other, and every knife that "plugged" safely toward the juicy heart of the green tempter left its owner exempt from any part in the payment therefor; but the knives that flew unsteadily, or out of line, doomed their owners to financial outlay. Paul had a steady arm, and a good boyish swing, so, oftener than not, he walked rapidly away munching his part of the crimson sweetness with no financial

outlay—which did not in the least affect its flavor.

Another thing which beset his path were groups of boys deep in the intricacies of marbles, or the bold game of "plugging tops." That same steady arm and good boyish swing made Paul a frequent winner in either of these sports, and they were giants of temptation in his path! But they *must* be passed by if he kept his job; and so, a little lingering to watch a game, and then speeding down the road to make up for it, was the usual extent of his yielding. His mind was not slow in resourcefulness, however, and he soon found compensation by having some chums gather at the back of the station, where a game could often be sandwiched between errands. Then the great tops, through dexterous curve and

throw, went spinning to the marked circle, and woe to the one which gave a last throb within the circle's limit! For then it must be laid prone upon its side while all the other great, spinning fellows came "plugging" after it! Or, if the game were marbles, there flashed the beautiful many-colored agate taws, held so cunningly betwixt thumb and finger, then with dexterous twist sent straight to the goal—which meant the center marble or one of your fellow players' "alleys" ranged around the circle, and which, if hurled from their places by the skillful onslaught of your taw, meant that the plugged beauty was yours for "keeps."

These were the things most worth while at first in the boy-world of Paul—and indulgently allowed so long as his keen eye and ear were ready for the

least indication of need from within. But the mysterious clicking of the instruments in the telegraph office could not fail eventually to catch Paul's interested ear, and his every spare moment was soon spent watching the process of sending and taking messages, and learning the alphabet.

So cleverly did he put together bits of information that the operator soon rigged him up an instrument in the office, without wire connection, of course, but on which he might practice. More and more each day did his ear learn to recognize the delicate shades of difference in sound which make up the Morse alphabet. He found himself able to read messages as they came in! One day, when he had been in the office about six months, the operator hap-

pened to be out, as some one called persistently over the wire.

Paul went up to the instrument at last and opened the key, his hand trembling a bit. But the minute the message began he forgot himself, and took it with the greatest ease.

When the operator returned and saw the message, which was entirely correct, he said:

"Good for you! I wouldn't have missed that for a farm."

After this it was frequently a very convenient thing to get Paul to take or send a message; and often, too, he might have been found working side by side with the operator, for the office was a growingly busy one.

When Paul had been there about eight months, the division superintendent came in one day, and said:

"What am I going to do? The operator up at G—— is down with fever, and there isn't a man I can send in his place."

"I'm sure I don't know," replied the operator, "unless you take Paul."

"Paul? Why certainly, I'll take anybody I can get. Who is Paul?"

The operator stepped to the door and called the boy in from the platform, saying "This is Paul."

The superintendent's face clouded, —he was in no mood for a joke, but the operator instantly said:

"Sit down, Paul, call up Galveston and get the latest press report on the election. Tell Jordan you must have it for the superintendent."

The superintendent listened in astonishment as the boy gave and re-

ceived his message with perfect ease and accuracy.

"Look here, my boy," he said, "I want you to go up to G—— and take charge there for a few weeks."

"I don't know, sir, if Father will let me go," replied the lad.

"I will go home with you at once and we will ask him."

He was successful in so putting his need as to win Mr. and Mrs. Shelton's reluctant consent, and Paul went up to take charge as station master and operator at G—— at the age of thirteen.

As he sat on the operator's stool his short legs did not reach the floor and the "new operator" became a huge joke for the railroad people, but none who observed him a while doubted that he understood his business.

A day or so after he arrived, two men walked behind him as he went to his boarding place.

"I tell you he is a formidable telegraph operator, isn't he?" laughed one of the men.

"I'll wager he don't weigh 100 pounds," said the other.

"Well, I don't know about that," said the first man, "but I'll take you up."

So they joined the boy and asked him to stop in a store and settle the matter. Paul enjoyed the joke and readily went with them. One of the men lifted him upon the counter to the scales and he tipped them at 98 pounds.

Paul's place of work was situated at a particularly lonely spot. The railway station was beside the railroad

tracks, of course, but the town lay half a mile beyond it, while on the other side there was a deep, impenetrable wood, holding all sorts of possibilities —including, again, Aunt Sofy's ghosts. The freight house was farther down the track, and there was more or less pleasant activity in its environs from seven in the morning till seven at night. After that there was only silence left for the two hours from seven to nine, at which latter hour the small station agent and telegraph operator might take his leave and make the dark, lonely walk to the town half a mile away. There is no old saying about the things that try boys' souls as there is about the trying of men's souls; but Paul could have told graphically about some of them. The sounds that came from that mysterious

wood, alone, during two hours each night would have made a volume, while they were accompanied by a simple phenomenon that made them nothing less than tragic. Above the station converged the wires leading down to the telegraphic instrument. When the wind passed through them, it played various harmonies which were quite at the will of the listener for interpretation. Paul had loved to hear them in the station at home when everything was still, for it was a sweet, beguiling tune which the wind-swept wires sent softly down to him. But now, alone at night, on the edge of that impenetrable wood, the tunes the wires sent might have been weird cries of departing souls! Sometimes they came in low moans of anguish, sometimes in wild cries of fright and deso-

lation! Many a night, especially at first, Paul scarcely took his eyes from the clock as he listened and longed for the hands to creep round to the hour of nine. How welcome then, during this interval, was a sudden ticking of the instrument, and the boy's quick hand came in touch with the world again! But all things end in time, and so with each night vigil, which he learned to keep with more and more courage.

When he reached the town itself, then all was changed. Everything was life and activity, for a small Texas town did not wake up fully till about nine o'clock. Usually the boy was too tired from the day's work and cares to do anything but go to bed under the comfort of human nearness. But sometimes he had curiosity to know what

everybody else was interested in, and made investigations. He dropped into a variety show one night and really looked for the first time upon gaudy costumes and listened to vile jokes. The boy's clean soul made quick recoil.

"If that's what grown folks like, then I hope I'll always stay a boy!"

And he slipped from the place and went to bed,—but the smirch did not leave him for a long time. It came back, however, only to renew his disgust. There was no analyzing or defining, but just rebellious casting off,—and angry impatience at having to repeat the process.

But there came a real temptation and weak yielding which must be recorded. It was the hot summertime, in the long, simmering, blistering days of July when Paul took charge of the

station, and a few days after his arrival there came the noisy chatter and wholesome whooping of a party of boys along the road from town. Paul was instantly on the platform in friendly comradeship. This was reciprocated with lusty urgings to him to come along, too.

"Where?" asked Paul.

"To—der—swimmin' hole," came lustily in response.

Now, if there was anything that made more urgent appeal to Paul than anything else under the sun, it was a swimming hole! For, having survived an early drowning, swimming had taken first place in recreation for Paul. But he shook his head slowly, for hadn't he agreed to take charge of that station? So, in spite of urgings and sneers, he kept his place stubbornly.

But the simmering days went on and on, with the enticing group of boys coming and going, and there is an old adage to the effect that constant dripping will wear away stone,—which may be true. At any rate, Paul, who was a keen observer, began to note that the dull hour in business at the station was strangely coincident with the swimming hour for the boys. He suddenly decided one day that he would see that swimming hole!

Now, seeing a swimming hole, for a boy, is absolutely fatal. This one, in the depth of the cool forest,—even though not far away,—was all that was ideal in the way of swimming holes. And, topping its mirroring depths at one corner, was an ideal spring board from which one dived to

the hidden treasury in the pool's deepest depths!

Paul's limited costume was off in a twinkling, and down he went from the tallest tip of that spring board!

After that, almost every day, he took that drowsy hour of business and transferred it to the swimming hole! (A faithful biographer must tell facts.)

To offset this yielding to the mortal demand of boyhood, however, came an unexpected levy upon the boy's courage and stability for the things of men. A band of desperadoes was terrorizing many Texas communities. They rode daringly into town after town, shooting and looting at their will. Sheriffs in all that region were energetically trying to "round them up." When a burly, big Texan with justice in his eye walked into Paul's station one day

at this time, he scowled at the slight, boyish figure which was all the official equipment in sight.

"Whar's the agent an' wire man?" he thundered.

"I'm the agent and telegraph operator."

Paul thought for a few minutes he would be devoured on the spot. Finally the man brought out—"They tole me thar warn't nothin' but a boy here, but I didn't speck ter see er baby!"

"I can do anything you want done," said Paul, simply, and the keen eyes under the shaggy brows bored into the boy. "Send this here wire, and do it —quick," the sheriff said gruffly, but with a kindly tone creeping in that warmed the boy's heart. He sat down

at once to the key and sent the message with swift, sure hand.

When the answer came back and the boy read it from the ticking keys the sheriff's eyes softened to a smile, and he said, "Skeezicks, you'll do!"

After pondering a little, ignoring the boy, he suddenly turned and said, "How late do you stay here nights?"

"Till nine," Paul returned.

"Anybody else stay?"

"No."

"Well, I'll be dad-burned," the sheriff exclaimed, an instinctive respect for the boy keeping him from more forcible expression. "Think you can stay till twelve, or mebbe atter, some nights, ef I want yer to?"

"Yes," said Paul, hesitatingly.

"'Course yer can," thundered the

officer again, but with a kindly twinkle that made Paul surer.

"Yer see," went on the big man, "you an' me's got to get them bandits. It's up to us, an' when we do, I'm er goin' ter take you away from this graveyard place an' make you my deperty."

He went off, while Paul smiled to himself, for that telegraph instrument, with its wonderful possibilities, was far more alluring to him than a sheriff's career. But outlaws and bandits were no smiling matter, as he had seen demonstrated at home. And so, there came more trying of a boy's soul, for he did have to stay many nights till twelve or one o'clock, take the lonely walk to the town—when his young legs flew over every step of the way—with the possibility of bandits bursting upon

him every moment! But even this flight was a relief after hours of lonely listening, never knowing what moment the bandits might burst in upon him at the key. Nevertheless he entered into the spirit of the chase, wired back and forth with excited interest, and was always delighted when the call for "Skeezicks" came. He knew then that it was his particular chief, the sheriff.

There came a night in the very thick of the effort of the law against the desperadoes, when at one o'clock Paul did not think it was safe to leave the instrument. He wondered if he could stick it out all night. He didn't know. He would try. Then he suddenly went around to see that everything was fast, doubled up some meal bags that lay in the corner of the room, and lay down on the floor with a simplicity of

heroism that only youth could have achieved. He fell asleep instantly—but after an hour or so there came a persistent ticking that opened his eyes like a flash, and he was up at the instrument as quickly. It was from his chief and proved the most necessary link in the chain that closed about the bandits, while right speedily their punishment was meted out according to the methods of pioneer days.

Next morning Paul went to his boarding house for breakfast as though nothing had happened, and no one would have known that he had any part in the "round-up" if it had not been for the sheriff.

With the early fall days, the station master who had been ill, recovered, and again took his place. So, Paul, having finished his work as substitute,

and won a pretty general reputation as the crack boy operator among the telegraph fraternity, returned to his home and resumed work in the office there.

"I'll have to take that boy out of that office," laughed his father; "they are making him a regular operator. They say they can't keep him out of it." But Paul, though slender of build, was strong of fibre, and was so happy in his work that he was left undisturbed a while longer. Then a relative of the family accepted the place of operator and found himself unable to take the "C.N.D. reports" (Commercial News Department), which gave the fluctuations in market price of products, dealt in minute fractions and decimals, must be very accurate and were exceedingly difficult. Paul had been working at

them for some time and found no trouble with the task. So the new incumbent of the office raised Paul's salary to forty dollars a month, and gave him the commission on the C.N.D. reports, amounting to ten dollars more, and Paul remained. Of course a new messenger boy was engaged.

Paul remained at this work for a year as his salary was of great service in enabling Mr. Shelton to keep the girls at college. When the year was out he said to Paul:

"Now, my son, back to school you must go." The boy demurred at first, for business had proved fascinating; but obedience was a family law, and Paul once more took up his books for study after three years of business life.

XV

A YOUTHFUL DEBATER IS DEVELOPED

THREE years of study in the home schools followed for Paul, with tasks as well as play for the spare time. There was wood to be cut for the cooking and winter fires, garden and yard to be cared for, cows to be milked. Paul and Willie, now a stout boy of ten, attended to these tasks, the burden of it falling upon Paul who was four years the elder.

The family was changing with the years: Flora and Blanche married and went to homes of their own, leaving Sallie and Ophelia as the "big girls," while two little new-comers had been

added, Ada and Susie. Seven girls flanked by only two boys the family records show.

A busy life was the lot of that pioneer mother. No help was to be had for the housework as it was impossible even for planters to get sufficient negro help. Cheerfully she worked on and on, always even-tempered, sympathetic, and helpful. It would be difficult perhaps to define the effect of her life upon the characters of her children, to say that she gave them this or that bent. From her came, rather, a steady, pervasive influence of deep, placid religious feeling and strict integrity; also a certain fluent, poetical picturing of commonplace and spiritual things, —her face alight with inner visions,— which kept their imaginations active.

It might be said that Paul inherited

in full measure her fluent tongue and vivid imagination. He combined with these a keen sense of humor and was quick to give things a ludicrous turn, which made him a lively member of the family, especially at table, all during his boyhood, gradually sobering down into the serious period through which most boys pass as they feel themselves important factors in the world's scheme.

The church which Mr. Shelton had planted was growing with the prosperous town, and the Shelton children were always regular attendants upon church services and Sunday school, Paul continuing to go obediently, although it must be confessed he shared the opinion of most boys of his age: that he was "too big" and should not be expected to go.

There was singular freedom in the

discipline of the Shelton home. The children went freely about their tasks or play with little intervention or direction unless someone went flagrantly wrong, then the father spake out with brief, decisive command which rarely required repetition. One of these commands for the boys was against loafing the streets of the town at night. He did not object to their going out on a matter of business or to a respectable place of amusement, but idle walking of the business streets he would not permit. One night which Paul was spending with a chum some years before had brought for him temptation to disobey this rule and he yielded. The matter reached his father's ears by some unexpected route and when the old command had been renewed with the effectual emphasis of a stout switch

(the first and only time it was thus used with Paul), it was never broken again.

At school the boy of fourteen took up his studies with all the old interest and stood well in his classes. He loved sport too, and was in the thick of things generally, and sometimes seriously. One day two of the boys, Hal Kendrix and Rob Hite, got into a desperate fight, and one of them took a knife in each hand brandishing them fiercely, while the other flew for a heavy plank. Paul seeing that both boys had completely lost their heads, stepped up to the one with the open knives, laying a hand upon his shoulder and begging him to stop. But the boy only flourished his knives all the more wildly. Paul stepped back and happening to look down at his hand found the blood

streaming down from beneath his sleeve. This stopped the fight and Paul went immediately to the family doctor who found a severe cut in the arm requiring several stitches. The Doctor said had the cut been half an inch lower it would have deprived him of the use of his right arm. Hal Kendrix had gone with him, and taking the good arm as they left said with an awkward tenderness that had in it a plea for forgiveness: "That's what you get for being a Cap'n Pluck."

Paul soon proved an inveterate reader and filled in his spare minutes with "Jack Harkaway's" adventures, and those of "Dick Lightheart," to say nothing of novels of the "yellow back" variety which frequently held him captive.

Again his father spoke, and effectively.

"See here, Paul, you are simply wasting your time with those books, to say the least. If you want romance and adventure I can supply you. See there," and he pointed to a row of little black books at the top of a bookcase. "If you will read them you may have that entire set of books for your own, and if you do not enjoy them I shall miss my guess."

This brief word and direct proposition marked an epoch in the boy's life. He at once began reading the small black books, Sparks' American Biographies, and found the story of the lives of Washington, Israel Putnam, Patrick Henry, Robert de la Salle, Nathaniel Green most entertaining reading.

There were some maxims Mr. Shelton now and then repeated which stuck out in Paul's memory: "You can do whatever you want to," "If a thing is worth doing at all it is worth doing well," and, "There is always room at the top." These the boy never forgot and how much they influenced his life cannot be estimated.

Paul about this time became greatly interested in the school debates. The youthful orators settled such disputed questions as these: "Which was the greater, Washington or Columbus?" "Which gives the greater pleasure, pursuit or possession of an object?" "Was the South justified in seceding from the Union?" "Was Lee or Grant the greater soldier?" and like weighty subjects, which required reading along profitable lines. So intense became

the heat of debate that the boys sometimes confounded oratory with personal animosity.

When Paul and Hal Kendrix settled forever the question as to whether or no Washington was greater than Columbus, Paul most vehemently denounced his honorable opponent as a traitor to his country in his disparagement of Father Washington, and Hal, always a fighter, proposed to settle the matter of this personal attack afterward by means of fists, but Paul succeeded in laughing him out of it.

Paul rose mightily in eloquence, and figures of speech fell glibly from his tongue. But that ready tongue had a trick of playing him false sometimes, and one night he brought down the house as he referred to the innocence of the unborn babe, meaning of course

to cite the virtues of that well-known prodigy of innocence, the new-born babe.

So three years went by and then the father's word was:

"You must go to college."

Vacation periods of these three years had been times of work for Paul with some hunting and recreation interspersed. It was about this time, too, that he began to note the flutter of pretty white dresses and gay colored ribbons, and sometimes to gaze speculatively into a pair of merry eyes or wonder how the touch of some soft, straying curl would seem.

He was deputy for the county tax assessor, helping to make out the official papers, which took him to the country. Another year he went with a friend on surveying trips as helper,

camping out and sleeping on the long prairie grass with the exciting possibility of being bitten by a tarantula before morning.

Alf Sea, another friend, was studying law, and Paul was frequently with him in the office of the town's leading law firm where Alf studied, and the law began to make strong appeal to his boyish imagination, which finally crystalized in a definite resolve to become a lawyer. Simultaneous with this decision came the intention of going to Congress, and the presidency of the United States was only a little less definitely fixed in his future. His father had said: "You can do anything you want to do," and he took it literally.

One friend of Paul's who had chosen a business career, and was making good

progress, was an orphan boy, and about this time in looking over some old letters written by his father and mother he came upon a tender, beautiful passage in a letter of his mother's to a friend dedicating her boy to the work of the ministry. The boy was shaken to the depths of his soul, and came forth afterward firm, happy in his determination to preach the gospel.

Paul shook his head at this. "I would not want anything like that to happen to me," he said, "for I could not be a preacher to please any one living or dead."

XVI

A COLLEGE BOY

OBSERVING the somewhat drooping shoulders of his rapidly growing boy, Mr. Shelton decided to send him to a military school, and Paul accompanied by Hal Kendrix arrived in due course of time at the leading military, agricultural and collegiate school of the state.

It was well equipped for the times, and several hundred boys were in attendance.

A few days after Paul's arrival two young fellows stopped him on the stairs, as he was leaving the dormitory, and introduced themselves.

Prencher and Sleed were their names, and one of them said:

"You are a new-comer, we see. We are old stagers,—were here last year. We'd like to know you, have you in our company, and as we want another roommate, will be pleased to take you in with us."

This was a surprising offer, as both were commissioned officers, and Paul had already observed were school leaders.

He replied appreciatively but said he had come with a boy from his home town, they were rooming together, and he would not feel that he could desert his friend.

"However," he said warmly, "if things should turn about so as to make this possible I will gladly accept your offer."

This did not come about for some months, but the three boys were from the first strong friends and associates. Prencher was of German descent, and a fine scholar. Sleed, though not quite so fine a student was greatly respected by all for his fine, manly qualities.

Two literary societies were organized, Paul joining one with his two new friends.

The work of organization went slowly. To many of the boys it was a new experience, and even students of the previous years seemed to care little for it.

Paul saw the lack of interest, and rising, made a ringing little speech, outlining possibilities which the society opened for them, and when he had finished the boys applauded vociferously. "Captain Pluck" was made president by

acclamation and took up the work with great interest, though he would greatly have preferred a place on the floor where he might take part in debates. At all public meetings, however, he was always a speaker and their open debates were attended with great interest by people of the community. Of course girls were charming constituents of the audience and the loyalty of some fair listener was great inspiration to each individual speaker, while bouquets with fluttering ribbons from these fair hands at the conclusion of a masterly effort crowned occasions that come only once in a lifetime to mortals.

Paul's devotion to the literary society cost him dearly at one time. Just after he had called the meeting to order a messenger came in to tell him that a box had arrived for him by express.

Feeling that he must not neglect his duty there, Paul simply signed for the box and went on with the meeting. At the close he gathered some special friends about him, and said:

"Fellows, I'm sure there is a treat in that box, which has just come from home by express, and I want you to enjoy it with me."

There was enthusiastic acceptance of the invitation, and a hilarious little party went in search of the box only to find it gone, absolutely gone! They looked high and low, not giving up the search till late that night.

Next morning a letter came, itemizing the contents of the box, and increasing the poignancy of regret. When Paul read the list over to his group of friends there was resounding,

sympathetic response as the contents were unfolded.

"Pie," (moans), "silver cake," (louder moans), "gold cake," (intense moans), "preserves," (deep groans), "pickles," (deeper groans), "fruit cake," (dismal, frantic howls)!

The letter also said that a pair of shoes for Hal Kendrix had been included in the box, and that doughty warrior immediately announced that he would whip the fellow that had his shoes. Whether or not this threat brought forth any clues would be hard to say, but the fact remains that the investigating party were led to search the stable where they found an empty box and a few crumbs eloquent with the pathos of "might have been." A search in the hay brought to light Hal Kendrix's shoes, but the mystery of the

theft was never revealed. There were suggestions about the stable boy, but Paul and his friends always had their suspicions about Sloan, leader of the rival society, and his crowd, who had been especially sympathetic over the loss.

"Blind Tom," a wonderful negro musician who traveled about the country giving concerts at that time was announced to give one of his entertainments at a near-by town. Some of the college boys suddenly developed great appreciation of the art of music, and in spite of refusal from the authorities, in one of those unaccountable rebellions which sometimes seize students, determined to go without permission. Paul and his crowd, including Prencher and Sleed, with Sloan and one or two others made up the party of ten. They

hired a big, two horse wagon and went to the town of M—— some six miles away, making a great lark of it.

When they were seated in the concert hall, who should walk in and be placed exactly opposite them, but one of the college professors!

There was consternation at first and a slight attempt at bravado, but they subsided soon into a highly decorous party.

On the way home there was some anxious discussion of the outcome, for the offense was one which called for either expulsion, or reduction to ranks, as most of them were commissioned officers. But the night air was exhilarating, some of the boys had had recourse to cheering spirits of a most questionable sort, so the party grew merry, and a bit reckless withal. They

bowled along over the road at high speed and suddenly the horses swerved from the beaten track, and before any one could check them, had plunged down an embankment into a ravine, overturning the wagon. It was surely a kind providence that spared those erring boys in that dangerous accident. Not one was seriously hurt, but when they got upon their feet there was a commotion from beneath the wagon, scrambling and smothered outcry. Looking about they realized that Paul Shelton had been caught beneath the wagon body as it overturned. Of course they released him speedily as possible, and he proved to be unhurt like the rest.

It was a trying task to extricate the frightened horses, and a marvel that they, too, were unhurt, also to right the

wagon and draw it up the embankment, while most of the handkerchiefs of the party were torn into ribbons to put the harness in shape and make even a slow, careful driving the remainder of the way possible.

They reached the college about daylight and stealthily made way to their rooms.

Paul said to Sleed as they undressed that he did not see how there was any room under that wagon body for him. "The thing was just chock full of remorse," he added, laughing a little nervously. And in the aftermath of teasing, Sloan took great delight in crying out anywhere as he happened to meet Paul:

"O, Shade of Captain Pluck! Please hurry! Get me out of here, O please!" And Paul lay in wait to get even.

The professor who saw them at the

concert was called away on a sudden trip, without even returning to the college, and on coming back a week later, though the guilty ones trembled, nothing was said. They never knew whether he forgot it or was merciful, but they were deeply grateful and most of them had learned a valuable lesson.

Not long after this a young ministerial student named Chilton was on guard one night. He was small, with curly, yellow hair and blue eyes—"the baby" some contemptuously, some affectionately, called him.

The guard room was located at the right of the short entrance hall which contained the branching stairways and joined the long hall which ran through the dormitory at the middle of the building. It was four stories high, each floor having the divided stairways,

long hall and short cross halls leading to small front balconies. On the fourth floor was the large chapel.

Chilton sat alone in the guard room, with his books, studying. Suddenly faint, distressing moans began to come from the entrance hall. Chilton listened a bit while the moans increased, and then he stepped out of a rear door into the long hallway and looked toward the entrance from whence came the sounds. A lamp, swung from the ceiling, burned dimly at the foot of the stairs and just beneath it stood a startling apparition: a tall figure clad in flowing white with a face like the face of the dead, blanched and hollow-eyed, moaning in blood-curdling unearthliness. One instant Chilton stared, then drawing his sword plunged for the ghost. This was an unexpected turn

of affairs, and when the ghost realized it, instead of being the remorseless pursuer of a frightened, curly-haired "baby," he found himself fleeing for his very life from that same curly, yellow-haired "baby." Up stairs they both flew, flight after flight, the long legs of the ghost keeping well ahead, till the fourth floor had been reached and then he disappeared. Chilton hurriedly peered right, and left, then searched the hall thoroughly and at last stepped into the chapel. All was still, nothing visible. He waited at the door, not willing to give his game a chance to escape, while he peered into every nook and corner. Finally a bit of white caught his eye from behind the rostrum and instantly he went for it. But the long-legged ghost again eluded him, and again both were fleeing down flight

after flight of stairs! On the second floor Chilton lost sight of him again and stopped a moment puzzled. Not a sound was to be heard. He tried door after door, but all were locked. At last he hurried down the short cross hall to the balcony in front. All was still there, but critical searching at last revealed a sprinkle of flour on the edge of a window sill.

"Ah, ha!" said Chilton, and raising it, stepped lightly into the room of the well-known Sloan. This worthy officer slept peacefully, even snoring slightly in the depths of his slumber. But Chilton struck a match, and revealed the flour-besmeared features of the ghost. Stepping back the guard also caught sight of a big, white roll beneath the bed!

"You are my prisoner," said Chilton.

The next hour was spent in frantic pleading by the big fellow that little Chilton would spare him. A report of the episode would surely result in Sloan's reduction to ranks,—a humiliation, a disgrace he could not face. Death seemed to him then far preferable.

Chilton was long obdurate, keeping Sloan in torture, but finally yielded.

The story leaked out, however, and Paul found full revenge in meeting Sloan with:

"Please, Chilton, p-l-e-a-s-e."

Sloan was a great practical joker and continued an unsparing tease in spite of his severe lesson. Many of the boys had suffered, and it was finally decided among them to punish him severely. They arranged a mock court and proposed to give him trial. The

night was appointed, the boys gathered, and the sheriff was sent to arrest and bring in the prisoner.

Sloan was brought in, stupefied with surprise and apprehension. The practical joker is always most illy prepared to take a joke himself, not being able to even recognize one when he is the victim.

A long paper was unrolled as he stood before the judge and Paul, as one of the prosecuting attorneys, read the indictment. It was from the president of the college, stating that it had come to his notice that Sloan had secretly secured from the steward favors in the form of cakes and knick-knacks between meals, having a secret understanding with said steward. Also that he had been observed to delay giving the order to leave table at meal time

so that he might secrete about his person certain choice bits from the table. Further, that he had been known to remain until an unreasonable hour when calling upon young ladies. These and like enumerated offences were serious misdemeanors, and the president wished his fellow students to try his case in regular military court, and would suggest the fixing of the punishment at nothing less than reduction to ranks, while the maximum penalty should of course be expulsion from school.

Only the obtuseness of a practical joker would have accepted these trivial charges as anything but a hoax. Sloan sat down under them in bewildered terror. The trial of the case went on in solemn reality, not a boy wavering in seriousness, in spite of the

terrible temptation to laugh. Witnesses were brought in, those for the prosecution being thoroughly primed, those for the defense bewildered, uninformed.

Then came the speeches by the attorneys for the prosecution and defense, when rhetoric flowed and argument was at white heat; finally came the judge's charge to the jury and their retirement. During the jury's deliberation of an hour the proverbial pin might have fallen in the court room without being heard, while Sloan sat with bowed head. The trial had taken the entire evening and the wee sma' hours were at hand.

Finally the jury appeared and the foreman announced the conclusion which had been reached.

After a long, solemn preamble came the final verdict.

"We, the aforesaid jury, do find John W. Sloan, high officer of the Cadet Corps, most gloriously—SOLD!"

Fully three minutes passed before Sloan took in the import of the verdict, and then there was a transformation. Springing to his feet he flung his cap to the ceiling again and again, then shook hands with everybody and the affair broke up in high glee. The lesson for Sloan, however, was most effectual.

Paul and six of his choice friends formed a society, redolent of Grecian mythology. They called themselves the "Argonautae" and took the names of Jason, Acastus, Euphemus, Peleus, Mopsus, Tydeus, and Meleager, while in imagination they sailed away in the

fleet ship Argo to capture the Golden Fleece,—Pleasure.

These seven had delicious evening spreads and expeditions of various sorts together. One evening after a supper where wine flowed freely Sleed and Paul left the banquet room together. Going to their room they sat down and after a moment both raised their heads and looked into one another's eyes.

"No, it won't do," said one, as though the other had spoken.

"It certainly will not," responded the other.

"I don't want to throw my life away in drunken debauchery—I've got a father and mother (with a little break in his voice) and if I hadn't," said Paul vehemently, "I wouldn't want to do it."

"Neither would I," said Sleed emphatically, "and that is just where we are heading for—drunkenness. For one I'm done with it all."

"I'm with you," returned Paul. They clasped hands and both went to bed. And in very truth they were done with it. No amount of persuasion could get them to return to the Argonautae unless there was a complete change of program, to which the rest would not agree.

This turn-about wrought an entire change in Paul's college life. He had been caught by the glamour of leadership and popularity, while having been well prepared for the collegiate course, and with an alert mind, he had easily maintained a respectable standing in his classes.

From the moment of his break with

"the crowd" new ideals were formed, and while there was still plenty of wholesome fun for him, there was much more earnest study.

He had been well advanced in Latin, Greek and mathematics when he entered, and soon forged to the front in all his studies. He had a peculiarity of mind that amused some of his professors. As the senior professor of mathematics put it: "A problem was either clear as a bell to Paul Shelton or he did not know one thing on earth about it."

He frequently groped hopelessly for a solution, and then all at once light flashed through it, as though an electric button had been touched, and he saw the whole thing in one swift glance, but he never let a problem go till the light did come.

So well did he apply himself that he completed the course in two years, and then was ready for the real world of work and achievement.

XVII

A TELEGRAPH OPERATOR AGAIN

AT the completion of his college course Paul returned home, but soon felt that he should be at work and secured a situation as assistant manager in the Waco Western Union office, which was easily done, as "Cap'n Pluck" was well remembered in the telegraph fraternity. His intention to be a lawyer had become more firmly fixed during the college years, but he must earn something first in order to be able to study law, and he naturally turned to telegraphy. He fell into the work again in Waco with ease, and was frequently left in full charge of

the office. One evening as he sat reading near his instrument the editor of the leading daily paper came in. The press despatches had been delayed, and growing impatient, the editor had walked over to see what the prospect was for getting them.

Paul looked up as the editor came in, and to his query as to when those Associated Press reports would get in, said courteously, "I will see if I can find out." And turning to his instrument laid a hand lightly upon the key, calling up Galveston.

"What about those press reports?" was his query.

"Be ready in half an hour," came the reply.

So the editor scribbled away in a note book and waited for the reports

to come in, while Paul turned again to his book.

At last came the wire call from Galveston, and putting aside his book, Paul again laid a slender, supple hand upon the instrument, while the editor sat by, an interested, though silent observer.

Next morning a long article came out in the editor's paper, a sort of meditation in which he had indulged while waiting in the telegraph office. He described the boy, not yet in his twenties, who with ease, skill and serenity laid his hand upon the marvelous little vital thing and tapped the world to bring forth the tale of its doings. Stories of war, pestilence and famine came tripping from his hand, accidents, murders, marriages and deaths. Slender, boyish, skillful, cool, he stood be-

tween the town of Waco and the big world, daily stirring hearts with his tales of weal and woe.

This bit of idealizing Paul did not soon forget, and it gave a new significance to his work. What if he should make an error and bring false tidings to those who trusted him as their knightly courier? A new note of faithfulness entered into his conception of his duty.

Galveston, finding the young Waco operator a most satisfactory communicant, offered him a better salary to come to that city, and Paul soon left to accept the offer.

Almost immediately after arriving in Galveston he was taken with an attack of fever. He was temporarily located in an old frame hotel near his work, with his room on the top floor, which

was the fourth. It was certainly a dreary experience for the boy: a stranger, alone, sick, weak and, yes, homesick. The old doctor who tended him fully diagnosed his case, and laboriously climbed the three long flights of stairs twice a day to administer comfort and good cheer as well as medicine. Servants waited upon him occasionally, and one of the men came in sometimes from the office, but the hours usually dragged by in deep loneliness. At last came a startling diversion. At midnight it came, and Paul's first intimation was in the form of a brilliant light in his room which suddenly wakened him. He instantly arose in bed and lifting a shade which he could reach he looked out into a canopy of fire, as the wind brought over the building a storm of glowing

cinders. It was a picture of horror which never left his mind.

A large fire was in progress close to his hotel. Everything was in commotion at once, people running down the stairs, dragging trunks along the hall, banging doors, etc. Then all was dead silence in the building. Paul had received strict instructions from the good doctor not to leave his bed under any circumstances, and in consideration of the old man's kindness he would not try to get up unless it was absolutely necessary. Courageously he waited alone on the top floor of that frame building, which was like tinder, and soon he heard men running on the shingle roof overhead, brushing off the storm of cinders which fell. Then he could hear them cry out, "It's caught here," "She's afire there," and "By

jove, we'll never save her!" Paul could stand it no longer. He crept out of bed and into his clothes, then dragged his trunk out to the top of the stairs. How he did it he never knew, nor how he tottered down the steps into the office. The clerk exclaimed as he went in, and ordered him back, but Paul laughed feebly and sat down. When he had rested a while, and the fire was reported under control, he crept back with help to his bed. The episode did not seem to hurt him in the least, however, and before a great while he was at his work in the telegraph office.

The interesting possibilities of a large city began to unfold for Paul, and while not wholly made captive by its glamour of pleasure, he made frequent excursion into its places of

amusement and found time flitting on rosy wings.

The theater fascinated him. He saw many of Shakespeare's plays, Macbeth, Othello, Hamlet, and so stirred was his imagination over their deep tragedy that he could not close his eyes in sleep after seeing one.

Temptation came, and it was a critical period through which he was passing. He proved faithful to his work, however, and one sore trial which fell to his lot was a constant warning not to stray too far from safe paths. He roomed with another operator, a young man much his senior who had fallen into serious dissipation, and Paul's efforts to keep him from drink, or to care for him when he had fallen, were a constant warning to him. In spite of this the boy's life was drifting dan-

gerously. He cherished the intention to study law, but the money which he meant to save was all going. At the end of each month there was nothing left.

One Sabbath afternoon, beautiful, clear, with a brisk little breeze, just an ideal one on the Bay, a friend proposed to Paul that they take two young ladies whom they often visited, out for a sail.

"Just the thing," said Paul. Sunday was fast becoming no longer the Lord's day, but the chief one for pleasure.

The two young men, speedily securing the company of their lady friends, made haste to the wharf and hired a boatman and his boat for the afternoon. Galveston Bay was beautiful, and they sailed on and on in merry converse till they began to feel the swell

of breakers from the great gulf of Mexico, which, should they enter it, would soon swamp their small craft.

The old boatman turned and said:

"Young gentleman, ain't this fur enough? I think it's time we turned round."

Paul's young man friend replied nonchalantly:

"I'll not be the one to say turn back."

"Nor I," said Paul in the same spirit.

"Then we won't either," laughed the two girls, and the four foolishly held to this bantering resolve.

The old boatman went grimly on for awhile, till they were almost in the midst of white-capped breakers, the long swell of rolling waves tipping their boat dangerously as they shot up and then plunged down, while the girls

screamed in delicious hysteria. Then he said:

"Well, I am going no further, whether you say turn back or not," and turning his boat about he set his sails for the city again. But, before they could reach the quiet waters of the Bay, the wind died down to a dead calm, they could make no progress, and there was great danger of drifting back into the Gulf.

All of the party recognized the situation as a serious one, though the boys with great bravado made merry for the sake of the girls.

At first they could not tell surely whether they moved or not, but anxiously gazing shore-ward they could see, from moving spires and smoke-stacks, that they were really drifting away to the Gulf on the outgoing tide!

The boat had no anchor, and each moment carried them farther and farther out, while the dead calm almost surely foretold a squall. Being Sunday there were few tug-boats on the Bay and none was within hail of them.

Paul left his seat with the girls and went back to the stern for a consultation with the boatman.

"Pelican Island is round here somewhere, isn't it," he asked.

"Yes," the boatman replied, "it's right out there," pointing toward the Gulf a short distance from them. It was then getting too near night to see well.

"It seems to me," said Paul, "that we might steer our boat sufficiently to drift down and get behind that island."

"You mean on the gulf side?"

"Yes," responded Paul eagerly, "where the tide wouldn't affect us."

"P'raps so," said the man slowly, "and mebbe we might tie up there till the squall passes or a breeze springs up."

"Surely," said Paul with eager hope, and sat down with the boatman, to help if he could.

Sure enough they soon found themselves slowly drifting toward the island, further and further into the rough waters of the gulf as darkness settled about them, which frightened the two girls extremely, but Paul and the boatman assured them that every moment brought them nearer a hope of safety.

At last they drifted within shelter of Pelican Island and tied their boat to the shore. The relief was immense.

As they waited motionless, however, the girls to their credit, became distressed over the worry of their parents. Neither girl had told at home of the nature of their Sunday outing, but had left it to be supposed that they were going for a stroll on the beach. They might have to remain in the motionless boat till morning. Their distress and remorse were intense, and the boys, not without serious compunctions of conscience themselves, gave up all efforts of cheer.

A tedious, trying hour passed and then came a gentle breeze which swelled a bit now and then. They set sail thankfully and slowly made their way around the island, by a long, circuitous route back to the city, reaching there about one A. M.

Their joy was too deep for many

words when they landed at last, and though there was much humiliation in restoring the girls to their parents, the boys faced it and remained long enough to take the entire blame of the unfortunate expedition upon themselves.

Walking home alone, Paul said grimly to himself:

"Some of Uncle Ed's luck again got me out of that hole, but there certainly wasn't any pluck mixed with it, or I'd have had the courage, as well as sense, not to keep that silly compact never to say turn back."

This was a most wholesome note of discontent, and it continued to sound in the depths of Paul's consciousness for days afterward, till it pervaded his attitude toward his entire course of life.

"Here I am," he said disgustedly to

himself, "intending to study law, and not turning a hand toward that end—spending every cent as I make it."

It was just about this time, too, that Gen. Grant stopped at Galveston on the return from his trip around the world. Strange as it might seem to northerners, the city went wild over the visit.

Paul joined the throng of people hurrying to the wharf for the moment of landing, and finally succeeded in getting a point of vantage where, from afar, he might get a glimpse of the great man.

Cheers went up from the throng as the tug with flags flying steamed into view, cheers which echoed and re-echoed until the tug paused at the wharf. Then a hush, profound in its breathlessness, fell upon them as each

individual reached and strained for the coveted glimpse, and the cheering was again caught up as the great man stepped within view of the waiting thousands.

Paul, while keenly feeling the thrill of the world's appreciation of the famous general, indulged in some philosophizing as he strolled away. Here was all this crowd of people eager to get a glimpse of the sleeve or top of the hat of a great man. If the effort were to take him by the hand and get inspiration from a look into his strong face it might be worth while, but they were simply striving for a husk, it seemed to him.

Was he not going with the crowd after husks in more senses than one? He must, like the famous man himself, strive for the kernels of life,—the best,

the highest things, if he ever amounted to anything.

It was just then, too, that a man in the office for whom he had great liking and respect, put a little book in his hands, advising him to read it. "Politics for Young Americans," was the title, and it set forth the highest ideals for American statesmanship, which fired Paul anew with the determination to study law, and awakened a new sense of his responsibility as a man and a citizen.

"I ought to begin to study law at once," he said.

To see a thing clearly always meant action with Paul, if action were called for, and resigning his position in the telegraph office, he decided to return home and begin his study of law at once. Mr. Shelton had told him at the conclusion of his college course that he

could remain at home and begin his law study there without delay, but Paul had felt that he ought to earn something first to support himself, as he had been on heavy expense during the two college years. Now he had failed most ignominiously, it seemed to him, and somehow he felt like going home to begin over again.

During all the years he had been away, letters full of the dear home life had come regularly to him; they were never dictatorial, but the tender love and interest, the high hopes for him which they always breathed, were strong safeguards and subtle directors of his course.

Arrived at home, after a day or two of rest and enjoyment, he started down to the business portion of the town to make plans for study in some law office,

and stopped in for a moment at the Western Union.

His old friend Ben Merrit was in charge there; the two had a rare talk about old times, and then Paul told Ben about his intention to begin at once the study of law.

"The thing I hate about it, though," he said, "is staying here on expense, which I can't meet, while I study. There are the two little girls coming on at home, you know, who need education and must have it," he said vehemently.

Ben thought a minute.

"See here," he said, "why don't you go to Dallas, or some city where there is opportunity, and get work for a few hours a day in the telegraph office, which would pay you enough to live

on while you study, and give you the time. There are always a few hours a day when there is a rush at a city office, and your fame as 'Cap'n Pluck, the Crack-a-Jack operator' is well known. I believe you could get the place all right."

Paul smiled at the last, but he was caught at once with Ben's suggestion. He turned about and went immediately home to consult with his father.

Mr. Shelton considered a moment, then he said:

"I think it's the very plan for you. I am glad to have you stay right here and study, but I see already you are going to be restive under earning nothing, while the plan to work and study at the same time will hold you to your resolve by supplying your mind with

interesting, purposeful occupation,—which it demands."

So it was settled, and Paul took the train for Dallas next day.

XVIII

A STUDENT OF LAW

ARRIVED in Dallas Paul went at once to the Western Union office. He made his proposition to the manager to work six hours of the busiest part of the day for part pay, and received kindly, but decided response. There was no such opening in the office.

"It would be establishing a bad precedent," the manager said, "and make dissatisfaction to allow you to work only a few hours each day. However," he continued, "we are unusually busy just now and a man short, so I would be glad if you would stay a week and help us out."

Paul decided to do so, as it would give him time to determine his next move.

After a day or two of work the Associated Press reports were given him to receive. The sender of these was the most rapid operator in the state, and was accustomed to frequent "breaks" from receivers to give them time to catch up. When Paul took the key, to the sender's astonishment, there were no breaks and he poured the "hot stuff" in a steady stream. At last it was the sender who made a pause.

"Who in thunder are you? Cap'n Pluck—Shelton, of Galveston? I don't know any one else who could do what you are doing."

Paul laughed and replied:

"Shelton it is."

"Then stay where you are, don't you leave Dallas on your life, this is something like," and then the stream poured on again.

In a little chat later with the sender of the Press reports Paul told him he was only in the Dallas office temporarily and stated the whole case to him.

"Well," said the operator, "we'll see what we'll see." And when it was convenient he talked over the wire with the Dallas manager. The upshot of this was that the manager came to Paul at the end of a week agreeing to the original proposition that Paul should work six hours a day and have the remainder of the time for study, but also proposing to give him full pay.

"The work we shall give you to do is the most difficult we have, there isn't

a man on the force who can do it satisfactorily, and they know it, so there will be no trouble about it, while your hours will be from six to twelve at night."

So the agreement was made, Paul was delighted, and entered upon his study of law with enthusiasm.

It so happened that, through the family with whom he boarded, request was made of him to sleep at night in the house of a wealthy family, whom a sad tragedy had driven from their home in the hope of diversion and help by travel. Paul, with a young reporter for company who boarded at the same place, agreed to do so, as it added something to the income of both.

The house was located on the edge of town, and Paul had a long walk through the quiet streets each night

when his work was done, arriving in utter darkness at the place about one A. M. Only the business streets of the city were lighted at that time.

While Paul would have been far from acknowledging any fear, it really took some courage for the youth of twenty-one to enter that deserted house alone at that hour. But he put his lips together firmly each time and made his way to the room where he slept.

It was elegantly furnished,—soft carpet, rich mahogany, delicate lace curtains, while over the mantle hung a massively framed portrait of the recently murdered owner, just opposite the bed!

The reporter did not get in until three A. M., when mocking birds began to make morning merry with song, for it was summer, and he always knew

company awaited him within. But Paul, having to come first, must spend the two most uncanny hours of night alone.

To say the least, the situation was not conducive to prompt sleep; there was the inevitable tendency to listen for night sounds, which rarely fail the listener in a large, uninhabited house. After a few restless nights and consequent tension of nerves, as Paul lay staring into nothingness, Aunt Sofy's three ghosts, dressed in the whitest and coldest white that ever was on earth, came suddenly into his consciousness—and relaxing completely he laughed outright, then turned over and went to sleep.

He had years before fought the final battle with those three ghosts of his

childhood, and now was not to be disturbed by the ghosts of ghosts!

The lonely uncanniness of the big house disturbed him no more.

XIX

ANCHORED

ONE Sabbath morning Paul was strolling alone. It was just an ordinary Sabbath day, giving no hint in its balmy air that it was to be a day of days for this young man, now six feet in height, slender, erect, alert. Neither was there any premonition on his part that an event which would shape all his future was just at hand.

He passed a large public hall where many people were hurrying in.

"Guess I will go in, too," he said, and followed the crowd.

A religious meeting was in progress. The songs were stirring, the people

eager, expectant. There was something in the very atmosphere that roused the spirit into vital interest.

When the speaker arose on the platform there was hushed attention. Simple, earnest, straightforward the talk was, but having that peculiar magnetic quality which grips the listener. Paul soon lost consciousness of himself, the speaker and the crowd in a strange, new realism of spirit. His life had not been meditative, it was too full of action, and hitherto he had groped hopelessly in the maze of spiritual truth, —when he had given thought to it at all—as he had sometimes groped with mathematical problems. Now the electric button was touched. A bright gleam from the very eternal throne itself seemed to light up the recesses of his soul!

He did not know how it had come about, but he seemed suddenly to comprehend the meaning of life! A simple thing, after all, when one saw it clearly. Life was linked with eternity—each individual soul coming from God, going to God, serving him, holding communion with Him, having constant companionship with Him all along the way!

He was suddenly in the light and the light brought joy, exhilaration. There was no possibility of another aimless day. His face was turned toward a definite goal, the goal of eternity which God should finally reveal—a goal more eagerly to be sought because hidden in divine mystery, because

> "behind the dim unknown
> Standeth Christ within the shadow
> Keeping guard above his own."

He had been cleansed and quickened by the power of Christ and he "stood God-conquered with his face to heaven upturned."

As he walked exultantly away from the meeting, light flashed back over all his past, and he marveled at its various ways, its dangers, its temptations, its struggles; how he had been kept in the hollow of God's hand through them all, made to grow strong and independent in spirit and body, so that he might stand at this new threshold, ready to enter upon a new life.

He went home at once, was received with high joy, and there made public acknowledgment of his God and Master.

There was an after process of doubt and readjustment which need not be followed in detail, but life took def-

initely upon itself a new, vital meaning for him. And then an unexpected, serious disturbance of mind followed.

A gay, young girl of whom he had been seeing much the few weeks previous, bantered him about it.

"I believe you are going to be a preacher," she cried at last.

That was it! The gay words defined his trouble. They pierced his soul with another sudden revelation. Yes, here was the issue before him. Should he preach the Word of God and give his life to service to men?

Long and fiercely he struggled. Desire, ambition clamored for the law, his chosen profession. The Spirit of God called him to a higher work.

He took the train again for home. Home was the Mecca when high things stirred his soul.

His father met him all unknowing.

"Father," he cried in a ringing voice as he stretched out a hand, "I must preach!"

The problem was solved with one look into his father's face.

"My son, my son," the father said brokenly, while the mother's eyes shone like stars as she took him in her arms.

There followed two years of frugal industry during which he laid by a sum sufficient for the necessary theological training, and thoroughly won the old title, "Captain Pluck."

The gay voice and merry face of his girl-friend faded for him along with the girl-faces which had held him briefly now and then, while in the brightness of the great unknown which stretched before him waited his mate, for

"Two shall be born the whole wide world apart
and have no thought
Each of the other's being, and no heed . . .
And all unconsciously shape every act to this
one end—
That out of darkness they shall meet
And read life's meaning in each other's eyes."

. . . . . .

On the night of Paul's return home, when the household was at rest and he was sleeping the sleep of youth and high determination, his father and mother, with strong sprinklings of gray about their temples, sat side by side looking gladly into each other's eyes.

"Shall we tell him of our prayer at his birth?" said the mother softly.

"No," returned the father, decidedly. "Let the Master continue His work without our interference."

And it was not till the thirty-fifth birthday, after years of successful ministry, that Paul received a letter from

his father telling of the first sight, early one morning thirty-five years before, of a bundle of muslin and lace which held his son Paul; and of the dedication by father and mother of that first-born son to the ministry.

THE END

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0002481581A